Biography

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THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON



Theodore Watts-Dunton (æt. 55)
(Photo by Elliot and Fry)

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON

BY THOMAS HAKE AND
ARTHUR COMPTON-RICKETT

*INCLUDING SOME PERSONAL REMINISCENCES
BY CLARA WATTS-DUNTON*

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

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Should we have failed to make acknowledgment for the use of any quotations in these volumes, we trust the omission will not be regarded as a discourtesy, but as having occurred through inadvertency.

THOMAS HAKE.
ARTHUR COMPTON-RICKETT.

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I.

LIFE AT ST. IVES

John K. Watts, Watts-Dunton's Father



THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON.

I.

Life at St. Ives.

(i.) *Early Childhood* (1832–42).

A SMALL boy, slight in build, with luminous dark brown eyes and black hair, is standing spell-bound before his father's bookcase. His inquiring gaze has been held captive by a title that makes his pulse beat quickly, for before him he sees those promising words—*The Faerie Queene*.

The boy is Walter Theodore Watts, son of the prosperous country solicitor, John King Watts; the place a large, old-fashioned residence facing the market-place of St. Ives.

Mr. J. K. Watts was not only an able lawyer, but a zealous scientist on intimate terms with Lyell, Murchison, and other geologists,* and he prided himself on his extensive scientific library. Romance, however, he frowned upon, viewing it maybe somewhat as Sir Isaac

* He had earned the soubriquet of "The Gilbert White of the Ouse Valley."

Newton viewed poetry, when he called it "ingenious nonsense." A few of the staider spinners of tales, such as Scott, received a grudging admittance to his shelves. But generally speaking the novelist found no resting-place among J. K. Watts's worthies. The sight of this stray reveller, with a title suggestive of poetic fiction, filled young Watts with ecstatic expectation. Let the experience be continued in his own words.

"My heart beat with such excitement that my fingers actually trembled as they pulled the book from the shelf. When I opened it, the frontispiece, an admirable engraving of the best portrait of Spenser, captured me at once, and even now the romantic beauty of that face seems to make all other faces inferior. I was a little disappointed at first to find that the *Faerie Queene* was a long poem, for it was through Charles Lamb's prose that I had become acquainted with Shakespeare's fairy stories. And again, I was a little disappointed to find that the orthography was so strange and eccentric. Wonderful, I thought, that a man with such a beautiful face and dressed so beautifully, with that lovely lace collar over his shoulders, should be such a bad speller, and yet write a great poem about the 'Faerie Queene.' However, I spread the book open before me on the table, and began to read the immortal story of 'The Red Cross Knight.'

"'A gentle knight was pricking on the plaine,
Ycladde in mightie armes and silver shielde,

Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,
The cruel markes of many a bloudy fielde.'

This was in the right vein; indeed, I could see the mighty arms, I could see the sun shining on the silver shield; I was fascinated."

"Yet armes till that time did he never wielde."

This announcement proved slightly disconcerting, for his imagination had conjured up "a picture of a professional warrior," and he was ill content with "a mere amateur;" in spite of the silver shield, etc., rather wondering that the poet should bring before him this quite superfluous fact.

However, he went on reading stanza after stanza until "the incidents and the pictures, and above all the glorious music of the grandest stanza in the world," lifted him into Paradise. "An archaic word coming up now and then had no more effect in impeding the rush of the poet's imagination or in breaking the flow of his music than a pebble or two disturbs the flowing current of a brook. I became so absorbed in it that I grew quite unconscious of the external world. Sometimes a younger brother or sister would come into the room, and I would see them as in a dream, but no more."

Spenser's famous poem was to dominate his imaginative boyhood, as it had done that of Keats. Indeed, the dominance of Spenser threatened to become a tyranny. One injurious effect of this was that his fasci-

nation prevented him from reading anything that was not in verse. And years afterwards, when it became his business to write a great deal of prose, his one great difficulty was that of keeping his prose from falling into verse rhythm instead of prose rhythm.

Theodore Watts was born on October 12, 1832. His father's mother was a dark woman, small of stature, from whom the boy inherited his physique. Mentally also he resembled her in several particulars, for she had a quick, alert, and intensely active brain, and a marked poetic temperament.

As regards his mother's family, the Duntons were pure East Anglian. The grandmother Dunton was a very religious woman, romantic in temperament and intensely interested in gypsies and gypsy life. Like his mother, she was small and dark.*

If his father awakened in him an interest in science, it was from his favourite uncle, James Orlando Watts, that he inherited his love of letters, and that exuberant, romantic strain which coloured his entire outlook on literature. J. O. Watts, a man of extraordinary learning in the academic sense of the word, possessed still more extraordinary general knowledge. He lived for many years the strangest kind of hermit life, surrounded by his books and old manuscripts. His two great passions were philology and occultism. He knew more about those writers discussed in Vaughan's *Hours with the*

* Theodore Watts added his mother's name of "Dunton" to his own, as stated in the deed poll, on April 17, 1896.

Mystics than any other person—including, perhaps, Vaughan himself; but he managed to combine with his love of mysticism a passion for the physical sciences, especially astronomy. His method of learning languages was unlike that of George Borrow, for he made great use of grammars, and was wont to express contempt for Borrow's method of acquiring a tongue from dictionaries only. When he died, from four to five hundred treatises on grammar were found among his books. Although he never wrote poetry, he translated a good deal from the Spanish and Portuguese poets. His fervent admiration of Shelley and his knowledge of the Elizabethan dramatists constituted a link between him and Swinburne, whom in after years he frequently met at The Pines. In short, there is no doubt that this uncle's considerable knowledge of literature must have been of inestimable advantage to his young nephew, Theodore, in early days.

(ii.) *Schooldays* (1842–49).

When about ten years old, Theodore was sent to a private school at Cambridge. Here he received a comprehensive education — Latin, Greek, French, German and mathematics, music, art and physical science. Neither Latin nor Greek attracted him particularly; nor did his acquaintance with German in the original ever become considerable, but he read voraciously in translation. Goethe's *Faust*, Schiller's

Robbers, Lessing, especially *Nathan the Wise*, attracted him at school and in after years. For French he had a decided penchant, mastering the grammar when quite young in scholarly style. His opportunities for learning to speak the language were, however, very limited, but he gained a considerable knowledge of the literature. All through life he was an enthusiastic admirer of Dumas. He never grew tired of reading his romances, and there is no doubt that after Walter Scott the great French novelist was his special favourite. *Guy Mannering* and *Monte Cristo* were the stories in prose fiction he most admired.

But his opportunities for novel reading were never extensive, and he would frequently deplore his comparative ignorance of prose fiction when he himself began to turn his attention to the writing of romance.

At the "Academy for Young Gentlemen" he was a distinct favourite. The principal at the school, who soon discovered that he was a boy of undoubted precocity, took a great fancy to him, and began to treat him more as a companion than a pupil, taking him about with him when going for walks or drives on visits to friends in the neighbourhood. He has described his introduction to this gentleman when taken to the school by his father, in one of his unpublished works. Here he relates how they were ushered into "a large and crowded kind of drawing room, where on a table stood two enormous globes, terrestrial and celestial." These globes were impressed upon the boy's memory to the

exclusion of every other article of furniture, from the fact that his father walked eagerly up to the terrestrial globe the moment he had shaken hands with the schoolmaster, turned it about and examined it with the deepest interest, while the schoolmaster, "a pleasant-looking elderly gentleman, with legs a little bowed and with soft brown eyes," stood watching him in silence with a look of expectation.

"'That globe,' said my father at last, 'like all other globes, is very imperfect. I've never seen a perfect globe, and never shall.' And he there and then uttered a long discourse on geography and on the ignorance of most men in that vastly important branch of knowledge."

As a matter of fact, his father had a perfect mania for maps, and treasured in his library quite a remarkable collection. It was said of him that he could have drawn a fairly accurate map from memory of almost any country. When Wyld was building his "Great Globe" in Leicester Square in 1851, a panorama regarded in the fifties as the most wonderful "show" in London, many a wrinkle was given by that learned Fellow of the Geographical Society, John King Watts.

"At that time of my life I had developed into a strangely imperious little chap," Watts-Dunton has recorded.* "I had been over-indulged, not at home but at the Cambridge school to which I had been sent

* *Autobiographical Notes.*

—and spoilt. This seems odd, but it is true. It was the boys who spoilt me in a curious way—a way which will not be understood by those who went to public schools like Eton, where the fagging principle would have stood in the way of the development of the curious relation between me and my fellow-pupils which I am alluding to. There is an inscrutable form of the monarchic instinct in the *genus homo* which causes boys, without in the least knowing why, to select one boy as a kind of leader, or rather emperor, and spoil him, almost unfit him indeed for that sense of equality which is so valuable in the social struggle for life which follows schooldays. This kind of emperor I had been at this school. It indicated no sort of real superiority on my part, for I learnt that immediately I had left the vacant post was filled by another boy—filled for an equally inscrutable reason. The result of it was that I became (as I often think when I recall those days) the most masterful-going urchin that ever lived."

The boy quickly realized, when he found himself the centre of attraction among his unknown schoolfellows, that being a "little fellow" for his age, he would have to find some means of defence against possible bullies. He soon hit upon the most effective way in which to "hold his own" against any show of pugnacity among his companions.

In those days there was a negro living in the neighbourhood of Cambridge known as "Sambo," famous

throughout England as an "instructor in the noble art of self-defence." The new boy determined without loss of time to take boxing lessons of the popular pugilist. To take lessons of this "coloured gentleman," however, required more pluck than is possessed by most lads. It was considered a serious affair, as every one, big as well as small, who had ever stood up against him in a sparring match could fully attest. Sambo, although he wore gloves that were soft enough when confronting a youngster, took a grim delight in punching his boy pupils upon the cranium with even greater spitefulness than he condescended to punch the cranium of a university man or any such like harder-headed opponent.

This artfully delivered "punch" of Sambo's had a distressful effect upon the brain; it never failed to produce at the moment of contact a bewildering sense of dizziness that resulted in a splitting headache—a headache which lasted for hours after the "punishment" was over. But what was still more exasperating at the moment of receiving the punch, one could perceive behind a mist, which the dizziness instantly brought before the eyes, the dusky face of the colossal negro, with a look upon it of immense exhilaration, his black, laughing eyes, his glittering white teeth between his thick red lips, forming a grim picture of diabolical amiability.

The youth took kindly to cricket, and was regarded as one of the best bowlers in the school, handicapped

though he was in his love of every sport, as well as in his work then and in after years, through his being short-sighted.

Holiday trips to London were memorable events. His father had legal connections in Bedford Row and Lincoln's Inn Fields; and business matters necessitated periodical visits to the metropolis, the boy occasionally accompanying him to town on these excursions. In those days a journey to London from St. Ives was no easy affair. The nearest railway station was Bishop Stortford, in Hertfordshire, nearly half-way to town, which could only be reached by stage coach.

These excursions to London made a vivid and lasting impression upon the lad. There were the numerous pigeons and pigeon-cots on the house-tops owned by bird fanciers, visible from the railway carriage windows when the train was approaching that crowded and poverty-stricken East-end suburb of London near the Bishopsgate terminus. It was a sight that fairly fascinated him, and for which he was always on the lookout. Then there was that panoramic exhibition—"The Great Globe"—which his father never tired of describing. This extensive building occupied the whole of the central space in Leicester Square, now transformed into a recreation ground. Then, again, "The Royal Colosseum" flaunted its glories in Regent's Park, where a still more absorbing panoramic performance took place: a realistic reproduction of the earthquake at Lisbon, graphically described by a

solemn lecturer to the accompaniment of slow music, with a "stage" storm in the background. And what delighted simple-minded Victorian schoolboys particularly were the pasteboard avalanches that met the eye on every side in the Colosseum grounds.

Nor did the immortal drama, "Punch and Judy," which might be seen almost at every quiet corner in the streets of London—and there was many a quiet corner to be found in those days of sixty-five years ago—ever fail to arrest his attention. Another "show" which he loved to talk about all through life was Madame Tussaud's Wax Work Show, which in its early Baker Street period was perhaps the most widely patronized of all the shows of that "prehistoric" age. Even as late as 1903 he wrote to a friend, "The name of Madame Tussaud is a name to conjure with. At my very first visit to London, the first sight I clamoured to be taken to was Madame Tussaud's Exhibition; and I have a distinct recollection of seeing the great Madame Tussaud herself, a beautiful young woman, selling tickets in the entrance hall with her own delicate hands.... I wonder whether Napoleon's carriage is still there. Some day I should like to go and see it again. To me it is one of the most thought-inspiring relics now extant."

But among the sights of London which he had the good luck to see at that plastic period of his life, there was one which in his recollection of those holiday trips touched him most. This was his visit to Jamrach's, the trading naturalist in Ratcliffe Highway. Jamrach

had recently come from Hamburg, where the father carried on a similar business. With such a keen student of zoology at his elbow as J. K. Watts during that walk through Jamrach's shop, the youthful biologist received an object lesson so full of interest and novelty that every detail was remembered for many a day.*

Naturally, as befitted a healthy schoolboy, he took a lively interest in fairs. The fact that the family residence looked out upon the market-place proved a joy in this matter. For it was there that the famous St. Ivian fairs were held. No town in England is more renowned for fairs than his birthplace. "An annual meeting was appointed on the Feast of St. Michael in the 11th century," to quote from the Chronicles of St. Ives, and a century later "King Henry the First gave to St. Ives a fair to be holden on Whitsun Monday, to continue eight days till the next Monday and all that day." †

It was at this early age, in these same holiday times, that there began to grow upon him the monastic habit of solitary wanderings over those flat-lying riverside byways around St. Ives—a habit which became more and more deep-rooted as the years rolled on.

He was never regarded as a "trespasser" by the local farmers. They all knew "Lawyer Watts's lad" and his attraction for cornfield and meadow, and he was let to wander freely wherever he chose.

* There is a description in *Aylwin* of the hero's visit with D'Arcy to Jamrach's.

† *History of St. Ives*, p. 15. See also *Hunts County Sketches*.

One favourite walk, not far distant from the house, was to a spinney on rising ground, from the top of which an extensive view could be obtained of the surrounding Fenland. One field alone, flat as a billiard table, covered an area of more than one hundred and sixty acres.

During these rambles by mead and stream the impulse to turn his attention to poetic composition became irresistible, and began to find expression. As far back as November 22, 1842, when ten years of age, he wrote some verses *To my Sister on her Birthday*, which are still extant, though more remarkable for fraternal feeling than for poetic gift.

But these poetic impulses during holiday time were naturally few and far between. A healthy, though romantic-minded, schoolboy would grow weary of constant countryside quietude, where the silence is only broken at the best of seasons by the song of the birds and the bleating of the sheep; consequently, he would on many an occasion turn his steps towards the blacksmith's forge by way of antidote, and listen to the local gossip and the rusticities of St. Ivian yokels, watching the while the bright sparks flying upwards from the anvil.*

It was only to be expected that the distinctive features of the locality in which he lived from earliest childhood should exert a special influence upon his

* There is a lively description of this experience in his unpublished novel, *Carniola*.

imagination. The picture that met his sight at every turn in this Huntingdonshire home was the ever widening extent of Fenland, where the sunrise over the "drain-cut levels of the marshy lea" rivals in beauty the sunset to be seen, on the other hand, across the broad expanse of the North Sea, the shores of which he often visited during the bathing season. On all sides, in fact, East Anglia made an indelible mark in the schooldays—one that proved of inestimable value in after years. One among the many incidents connected with his childhood in these East Anglian surroundings, was the eventful meeting, for the first time in his experience, with that fascinating tribe of gypsies known as the gryengroes or horse-dealers.

He has himself described in graphic detail this picturesque encounter. The unexpected sight of a gypsy encampment was the most memorable event at that romance making period, as a later chapter in the story of his life will make evident.

"I shall never forget my earliest encounter with the gypsies. My father used to drive in a dogcart to see friends of his through about twelve miles of Fen country, and used to take me with him. And in after years, recollections of these drives would often bring to mind one of my favourite chapters in *The Romany Rye* * about that delightfully garrulous old ostler, and

* *The Romany Rye*, by George Borrow, was published in 1857, when Watts-Dunton was twenty-four years of age.

his counsel with regard to the care of horses. For on every occasion when we reached the wayside inn, before we partook of our mid-day meal, my father looked to it that his horse was not cheated of his feed of oats.*

"The country through which we drove is much more striking than is generally supposed. Instead of leafy, quick hedgerows, as in the Midlands, or walls, as in the North Country, the fields are divided by dykes; not a tree is to be seen in some parts for miles and miles. This gives an importance to skies such as is observed nowhere else except on the open sea.

"In the Fenlands the level monotonous greenery

* "Should you ever wish to take a journey on a horse of your own," says the ostler in *The Romany Rye*, "you can't do better than follow the advice I am about to give you—both with respect to the animal and yourself. Before you start, merely give your horse a couple of handfuls of corn and a little water, somewhat under a quart; and if you drink a pint of water yourself out of the pail, you will feel all the better during the day. . . . Take care of your horse, as you would the apple of your eye—I am sure I would if I were a gentleman, which I don't ever expect to be, and hardly wish, seeing as how I am sixty-nine, and am rather too old to ride—yes, cherish and take care of your horse, as perhaps the best friend you have in the world. . . . Feed him every day with your own hands; give him three-quarters of a peck of corn each day, mixed up with a little hay chaff, and allow him besides one hundredweight of hay in the course of the week. Some say that the hay should be hard-land hay because it is wholesome; but I say let it be clover hay, because the horse likes it best. . . . If on a journey on a horse of your own, chat with the ostler at the inn two or three minutes till your horse has taken the shine out of the oats, which will prevent the ostler taking any of it away when your back is turned; for such things are sometimes done—not that I ever did such a thing myself when I was at the inn at Hounslow; oh, dear me, no!"

of the crops in summer, and in autumn and winter the vast expanse of black earth, make the dome of the sky by contrast so bright and glorious, that in cloudless weather it gleams and suggests a roof of rainbows; and in cloudy weather it seems almost the only living sight in the universe, and becomes thus more magical still. And as to sunsets, I do not know any, either by land or sea, to be compared with the sunsets to be seen in the Fen country. The humidity of the atmosphere has, no doubt, a good deal to do with it. The sun frequently sets in a pageantry of gauzy vapour of every colour, quite indescribable. . . .

"The first evening, then, that I took one of these drives, while I was watching the wreaths of blue curling smoke from countless heaps of twitch-grass, set burning by the farm labourers, and which stretched right up to the sky-line, my father pulled up the dogcart, and pointed to a ruddy fire, glowing, flickering and smoking in an angle where a green grassy drove-way met the dark-looking highroad some yards ahead. And then I saw some tents, and then a number of dusky figures, some squatting near the fire, some moving about. 'The gypsies!' I said, in the greatest state of exultation, which soon fled, however, when I heard a shrill whistle, and saw a lot of these dusky people running and leaping like wild things towards the dogcart. 'Will they kill us, father?' I said. 'Kill us? no,' he said, laughing; 'they are friends of mine. They've only come to lead the mare past the fire and keep her



from shying at it.' They came flocking up. So far from the mare starting, as she would have done at such an invasion by English people, she seemed to know and welcome the gypsies by instinct, and seemed to enjoy their stroking her nose with their tawny but well-shaped fingers, and caressing her neck. Among them was one of the prettiest little gypsy girls I ever saw.* When the gypsies conducted us past their camp I was

* "The prettiest little gypsy girl I ever saw" was the prototype of the famous heroine, Rhona Boswell, in the gypsy poem, *The Coming of Love*, who also appears in the gypsy romance, *Aylwin*. The page in which the description of her is given is beyond doubt a page out of his own schoolboy experience :—

"It was at this time that I made the acquaintance of Winnie's friend, Rhona Boswell, a charming little gypsy girl. Graylingham Wood and Rington Wood, like the entire neighbourhood, were favourite haunts of the gypsies. The business of these gypsies was to buy ponies in Wales and sell them in the Eastern counties and the East Midlands. Thus it was that Winnie had known many of the East Midland gypsies in Wales. Compared with Rhona Boswell, who was more like a fairy than a child, Winnie seemed quite a grave little person. Rhona's limbs were always on the move, and the movement sprang always from her emotions. Her laugh seemed to ring through the woods like silver bells, a sound that it was impossible to mistake for any other. The laughter of most gypsy girls is full of music and of charm, and yet Rhona's laughter was a sound by itself, and it was no doubt this which afterwards, when she grew up, attracted my kinsman, Percy Aylwin, towards her. It seemed to emanate not from her throat merely, but from her entire frame. If one could imagine a strain of merriment and fun blending with the ecstatic notes of a skylark soaring and singing, one might form some idea of the laugh of Rhona Boswell. Ah, what days they were! Rhona would come from Gypsy Dell, a romantic place in Rington Manor, some miles off, especially to show us some newly-devised coronet of flowers that she had been weaving."

fascinated by the charm of the picture. Outside the tents in front of the fire, over which a kettle was suspended from an upright iron bar, which I afterwards knew as the kettle-prop, was spread a large dazzling white tablecloth covered with white crockery, among which glittered a goodly number of silver spoons. I afterwards learnt that to possess good linen, good crockery, and real silver spoons was as passionate a desire of the Romany *chi* as of the most ambitious farmer's wife in the Fen country. It was from this little incident that my intimacy with the gypsies dated. I associated much with them in after life." *

After that first sight of gypsydom, the schoolboy was ever on the lookout for his friends the gryengroes; and in his lonely Fenland walks he had the good fortune to chance upon them more than once.

And so the schooldays passed happily away, and at last, when he was in sight of his twentieth birthday, came to an end. But the wanderings by the sluggish, dreamy Ouse, the walks over the Fenlands, and the occasional visits to the shores of the North Sea continued, indeed, for another twenty years.

(iii.) *The Literary Student* (1850–72).

The seven years at the Cambridge "academy" had proved an ideal school life, where mental development

* *Autobiographical Notes.*

in the direction best fitted to a contemplative nature received every care and encouragement. He now settled down in his home at St. Ives. But his education was by no means at an end. Its preliminary phase alone was over. He began to teach himself. He embarked on a varied course of studies, based no doubt on some of the subjects in the curriculum which he had already pursued at school, including science, literature, and even music.

Fresh from the Cambridge school, well equipped in the rudiments of science, and with an inborn love of natural history, he soon found his father's library more fascinating than ever, and hours each day were spent among the inexhaustible stock of knowledge to be imbibed there. J. K. Watts took great pleasure in reading aloud of an evening after office hours, when the trammels of legal affairs had been cast aside and he had taken his easy-chair beside the library table. His wife, for whom he had the deepest affection, had been during those hours in the library his sole companion hitherto, but now the seventeen-year-old son—a schoolboy no longer—became a welcome addition.

By means of these readings he gained an acquaintance with most of the literary and scientific books and journals of current interest; even the quarterlies were subscribed to regularly by J. K. Watts, and all articles therein dealing with the latest transactions in science, and the reviews of erudite works in literature, were read and discussed. No wonder then, living at home

under such favourable conditions, that this young scholar felt a strong inducement to choose some branch of science or literature as an avocation in life. The pursuit of science, however, never got beyond the amateur stage; and as to music, upon which he bestowed years of study—from boyhood to middle age—he abandoned it entirely, and at a moment when, having reached considerable proficiency, he seriously entertained the project of a professional tour as a pianist.

There was, however, a strong reason why he should adopt neither science, literature, nor music as a profession. J. K. Watts, with all his love of intellectual pursuits, had a keen eye to the main chance. This cultured youth was the eldest son of his father: he was the prospective heir to a conveyancing business (which was at that time extremely lucrative), and the connection must be kept in the family, as J. K. Watts wisely contended. And so it came about, in the natural course of events, that the son took a seat at the desk in his father's office in the old market town of St. Ives.

Thus was he launched into the prosaic life of the office, and under more favourable conditions than fall to the lot of most men. But to one with a temper so romantic, the ordeal was severe. However, he contemplated his destiny with commendable philosophy, notwithstanding the tantalizing fact that the office windows looked out upon a wooded lane leading towards those very meadows through which he still

loved to wander and commune in solitude, as he had done when a schoolboy.

But the dry study of the law proved more tolerable than he had at first anticipated. A brother some two or three years younger than himself, also destined for the legal profession, had just left school. They read law books together. This brother, Alfred Eugene Watts, was one of the most companionable of men. No two law students ever worked together in more perfect harmony. They even extracted humour out of the uninspiring pages of the law.*

The method adopted by the two law students was somewhat unusual. The elder brother, being short-sighted, made a compact with the younger that he (the younger) should read the necessary law books aloud while the other did all the "coaching." By this arrangement the "coach" taught himself while teaching the pupil. The result proved highly successful.

Throughout this time Theodore Watts-Dunton was busily occupied working at stories or poems, or else writing articles for the *Cambridge Chronicle*, never looking for any remuneration. One day he chanced, while crossing the market place, to encounter a parson who had known him since he was a boy, and who had just been reading one of these contributions to the local newspaper. The reverend gentleman, after complimenting him on the article and on his literary gifts

* Alfred Eugene Watts is the original of "Cyril" in Watts-Dunton's novel, *Aylwin*.

in general, exclaimed: "Why—I have often wondered —why don't you write a book?"

He never made any effort in those days to submit to editor or publisher any of his manuscript in poetry or prose. The work accumulated and was always undergoing revision, for he suffered then, as in after life, from a highly sensitive artistic conscience which in his case, as will presently be seen, almost amounted to a curse.

While applying himself diligently during these years to a study of the law, he continued to take an active part in everything of any local interest in the least degree worthy of attention, whether it happened to be of a political or social character.

He took no slight part in the famous Volunteer movement in the early sixties, being one of the first to join the Volunteer corps at St. Ives, a unit of the Huntingdonshire corps, of which Lord Sandhurst was colonel. This corps adopted the Robin Hood colours —green and gray—for their uniform, with a bugle on the metal buttons. He even went so far as to write a pamphlet (which still exists) with regard to a jealousy that arose concerning the appointment of ensign in the corps, describing how the appointment brought about the disbandment of the unit.

The militant note showed itself in other ways. In a letter to the editor of the *Cambridge Chronicle*, dated September 13, 1853, signed "W. T. Watts," when twenty-one years of age, he resented in strong,

satirical language the expression "boors" as applied to the people of Huntingdonshire by the *Daily News* at that period.

"THE BOORS OF HUNTINGDON.

(To the Editor of the *Cambridge Chronicle*.)

"SIR,

"Although, in matters political, I have the modesty to call myself a 'Liberal,' I cannot bring my mind to ignore the fact that some of the 'Liberal journals' *do*, now and then, evince a spirit which might, perhaps, with more propriety, be characterized as *ill*iberal; and of all the papers going, I think the most notable for this extreme *illiberal Liberalism* is the *Daily News*. An instance of this has just occurred, which I will cite.

"Last week the *Times*, relaxing somewhat in its Cockney hatred towards everything relating to English agriculture, proposed to render the anticipated 'Reform Bill' really a *reform* Bill, by bestowing seats upon the constituencies of the *counties* instead of the *towns*. The main reason brought forward in support of the argument was a very cogent and a very simple one,—there are more unrepresented people in the counties than in the towns. But this reasoning is much too liberal for the liberal *Daily News*, and accordingly the following piece of Yankee sarcasm is put out:—

"'Without stopping to ask why more county tenants *have not always* been allowed to vote, we may summarize the *Times*' argument in a very few words. It means, virtually, neither more nor less than this: that, as the Reform Bill of 1832 enfranchised the *intelligence* of the large towns, the Reform Bill of 1854 should enfranchise the *stupidity* of the rural districts. In 1831, Birmingham, Sheffield, and Manchester were for the first time permitted to send to Parliament the members taken from Gatton and Old Sarum; therefore in 1854, when you disfranchise places like St. Albans and Sudbury, give additional members to the *brilliancy* of Dorsetshire, and the *independent boors of Salop and of Huntingdon*. In 1832, the alterations in our representative system were in favour of *progress*—in 1854, let our changes tell of *re-action*.'

"Of course, it would be superfluous to comment upon the delicacy and gentlemanly point of this short passage,—so apparent must those qualities be, even to the dark brains of 'Huntingdonshire boors.' Certainly no one after this can doubt that, like the *Chronicle*, the *Daily News* keeps its own immaculate staff of 'scholars and gentlemen,' whose peculiar office would seem to consist in strengthening the abusive powers of the Anglo-Saxon tongue, by drawing copiously from the 'pure and undefiled well' of classical Billingsgate. But the *logic* of the quotation is really *too* rich to be passed by without a word. According to this precious specimen of Manchester ratiocination, the cultivation

of the bounteous earth on which we are placed is a dark heathenish occupation, synonymous with superstition and '*re-action*;' while '*progress*' is the inherent characteristic and exclusive birthright of the favoured weaver of stockings and the gifted manufacturer of pins!

"Yours obediently,

"W. T. WATTS.

"ST. IVES, HUNTS, *Sept.* 13, 1853."

At this time he wrote in the same local journal an article on "Old Books." It owed its inspiration to a lecture delivered at the Public Institution Hall, St. Ives, at which he chanced to be present. This article is of interest, as exhibiting the mental process at work that led to that marked individuality so attractive in after years.

After referring, in this article on "Old Books," to the lecturer's remark that he was "no advocate for voracious reading," he introduces as his own opinion that the same idea might be extended to travelling in search of wisdom.

"Our greatest delineators of human nature," he writes, "have not necessarily been our greatest travellers, as mankind presents much the same aspects in all countries and in all times; and he who studies humanity well in the few exemplars which his own circle may present, may be deemed to study it in all its forms and varieties. 'The world,' says St. Augustine,

'is a great book, of which they that stay at home read only a page.' True; buf may not the stay-at-home read and digest his one poor page so thoroughly—so completely—as to understand the 'great book' better than he who has skimmed over half the globe? What do we really know of Shakespeare's travels, save that he journeyed from Stratford to London, and from London to Stratford? And yet, did not the knowledge of human nature belong to this man surpassingly—almost miraculously? Has he not said the best things—often the only things worth saying—upon every subject bearing upon this insoluble problem of life?" *

Surely while penning these words the picture of his own stay-at-home life was haunting his thoughts. Not that he expressed any serious regret in after years for allowing some of the best days of his life to slip away in dreamy contemplation at St. Ives; indeed, he often talked of the immense advantage to a novelist born in the country over one born in a vast city like London. "In a county town like St. Ives," as he often declared, "one knows everybody, one has endless opportunities of studying every phase of character, but

* It was, no doubt, in some degree owing to the difficulties of travelling in those days (in the early fifties)—the nearest station, as already mentioned, being Bishop Stortford, some thirty miles by stage coach from St. Ives—that his journeyings were strictly limited. But this article in the *Cambridge Chronicle* clearly shows that he occasionally pondered regretfully, though with a touch of self-sophistication, over his narrow and stagnant surroundings.

in a large town one knows nobody with any intimacy —one frequently fails even to set eyes upon one's next-door neighbour."

In other columns of this same local journal, to which he contributed when he was little more than three-and-twenty years of age, as the dates clearly show, one comes occasionally upon the very same thoughts, even the same phraseology at times, which no diligent student of his critical essays, written in the *Athenæum* and elsewhere some five-and-twenty years later, could fail to detect.

"A FRIENDLY WORD TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ST. IVES MUTUAL IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY.

"GENTLEMEN,

"Are you aware that your system of reporting the discussions of your praiseworthy Society in the local papers is exposing you to no small amount of ridicule, both in St. Ives and the neighbouring towns? It strikes me you are *not*; therefore I am sure you will feel extremely grateful to me for apprising you —in the friendliest spirit possible—of that fact; and if, by-the-bye, you should feel a desire to coin your gratitude into something tangible, allow me, with all delicacy, to suggest the presentation of a silver inkstand at Christmas.

"Nothing can be better than the objects of your Society, viz., the inter-circulation of books and period-

icals, and regular meetings for mutual discussion. Reading is valuable — very valuable; but, without discussion—'that great *sharpener* of the intellect,' as a profound writer has it—reading is like unassimilated food. But surely these discussions of self-educating men are not to be blazoned about the world 'for 'daws to peck at.' They are for the sanctum of your own circle, and should not be vouchsafed to the unrespecting public. Let a man's intellect be what it may—until he has *trained* it to think, and to enunciate thought, its utterings must, of necessity, be rude and imperfect.* 'RESULTS, not PROCESSES,' says Samuel Warren, 'are for the eye of the world.'† Your Society seems to think otherwise; publicity, not privacy, is its motto. One week your discussions are reported by *Mr. Broadnibs*, the copyist (I am putting an imaginary case, because I abominate personalities), who assures the world that that eminent draper's assistant, *Mr. Whatnext*, chief speaker of the evening, is 'a young giant of poetry and eloquence.' This flattering eulogy, of course, rejoiceth the heart of Mr. W. exceedingly, who *feels*, as he treads the pavement on the following Sunday, that he is a marked man—that the eye of the town is upon him; and, in gratitude for the kindness of Mr. B., he feels constrained to characterize that gentleman in next week's paper as 'the incarnation of common sense.'

* A favourite remark of Watts-Dunton's all his life. At this time he was only twenty-three years old.

† He often quoted Warren's remark.

"Now, gentlemen, such nonsense as this is more than absurd—it is highly noxious to self-culture. It brings into the field other and meaner incentives than the pure desire for self-improvement. Depend upon it that Wisdom may be woo'd, but she will never be won by suitors who do not seek her *for herself alone*—she will 'shake her golden locks' and fly to more ardent, more faithful devotees. You have too much good sense, I am sure, to suspect me of wishing to debar you from the *expression* of your opinions (however *outré*) upon the weighty questions which are agitating the great world around us. Let every man think after his own fashion, and, perchance, 'absolute wisdom' may 'turn up' some fine morning, like Mr. Micawber's mythical good luck. I do not dispute the right of Mr. Somebody (I WILL not be personal) to rejoice in the opinion that 'Louis Napoleon has humbled us in the face of the whole world,' etc., etc. Nor do I quarrel with Mr. Somebody else for believing that 'this war is one void of principle.' But what, in the name of reason, does the world—the newspaper-reading world—care for the opinions of either?

"It is just possible that some ambitious '*member*' or other may write an indignant and warlike epistle in next week's paper, calling me 'slanderer,' 'scribbler,' and divers other uncivil names; but, gentlemen, though I care not one jot for any such denunciations, allow me to say to you, and to this indignant '*member*' *in posse*, that nothing but the most friendly feeling

towards your Society could have induced me to pen this letter, and that if I have said a word to wound, or even to offend, you I shall regret it.

"Your obedient servant,

"AMICUS.

"ST. IVES, *Nov.* 27, 1855."

It was at this most impressionable moment, when still further spurred in his literary ambition by having just read *Lavengro*, that he first set eyes on George Borrow.*

"I could not have been much more than a boy, for I and a friend had gone down to Yarmouth in March to enjoy the luxury of bathing in a Yarmouth sea, and it is certainly a 'good whiles'—to use Borrow's phrase—since I considered *that* a luxury suitable to March. On the morning after our arrival, having walked some distance out of Yarmouth, we threw down our clothes and towels upon the sand some few yards from another heap of clothes, which indicated to our surprise that we were not, after all, the only people in Yarmouth who could bathe in a biting wind; and soon we perceived, ducking in an immense billow that came curving and curling towards the shore, such a pair of shoulders as I had not seen for a long time, crowned by a head white and glistening as burnished silver. When the wave had broken upon the sand, there was the bather

* *Lavengro* was published in 1851, at the moment when Watts-Dunton left school.

wallowing on the top of the water like a Polar bear disporting in an Arctic sun. In swimming, Borrow clawed the water like a dog. I had plunged into the surf and got very close to the swimmer, whom I perceived to be a man of almost gigantic proportions, when suddenly an instinct told me that it was Lavengro himself, who lived thereabouts, and the feeling that it was he so entirely stopped the action of my heart that I sank for a moment like a stone, soon to rise again, however, in a glow of pleasure and excitement: so august a presence was Lavengro's then! I ought to say, however, that Borrow was at that time my hero. From childhood I had taken the deepest interest in proscribed races such as the Cagots, but especially in the persecuted children of Roma. I had read accounts of whole families being executed in past times for no other crime than that of their being born gypsies, and tears, childish and bitter, had I shed over their woes. Now Borrow was the recognized champion of the gypsies—the friend and companion, indeed, of the proscribed races of the world. Nor was this all: I saw in him more of the true Nature instinct than in any other writer—or so, at least, I imagined. . . . Although I would have given worlds to go up and speak to him as, he was tossing his clothes upon his back, I could not do it. Morning after morning did I see him undress, wallow in the sea, come out again, give me a somewhat sour look, dress, and then stride away inland at a tremendous pace, but never could I speak

to him; and many years passed before I saw him again." *

This description of George Borrow during that swim in the North Sea at Yarmouth is full of significance: the hero-worship which he felt so fervently at the time never left him; it may be said, indeed, to have increased as the days went by, for Borrow was the first literary hero that came within his ken. Indeed, there is little doubt that his dream, even in early days, was to succeed in that literary province in which George Borrow, "Prince of Gypsydom," at that time held full sway. It was a romantic figure, different in every respect from the poetic figures which subsequently claimed his devotion. But it was not only his worship of Borrow, the "lord of gypsy lore;" it was not only that first sight of his hero in the sea at Yarmouth that led to the conception and evolvement of his own gypsy romance, that would seem in his boyhood to have half-unconsciously taken root in his brain. That sombre expanse of gray North Sea had on previous occasions appealed to him. "My one idea," as he frequently remarked when speaking of *Aylwin*, "was to depict what I have always regarded as the peculiar 'atmosphere' and the mysterious spectral charm of the lonely East Anglian coast. . . . I love that lonely seashore."

He had, in fact, discovered how singularly appropriate as a background this coast-line would be in

* Vide *Old Familiar Faces*, by Theodore Watts-Dunton. (Herbert Jenkins, 1915.)

which to describe those weird scenes to be found in the opening chapters of *Aylwin*.

Much of the fascination as well as the charm of both inland and maritime Norfolk is naturally to be found in *Aylwin*. The author himself had more than once witnessed one of those landslips which are the dread of the region, and readers of his romance will recall the description of the collapse of the cliff front beyond the old church's ruins.

And now, having completed his articles, the trips to London with his father, or on his father's behalf, became more frequent. These trips were naturally made in pursuit of business rather than pleasure.

His father's favourite hostelry in London was the "Old Bell" Inn in Holborn. Its literary associations were irresistibly attractive to the young solicitor as well as to the father. Dickens, Thackeray, John Leech, Mark Lemon, and the staff of *Punch* generally, besides many other literary celebrities of that time, loved the old place, and often dined there on plain British fare.

But there was another reason—a prosaic one—why J. K. Watts and his son usually made the "Old Bell" their headquarters in London. It was within a stone's throw of the legal quarters—Lincoln's Inn Fields, Old Square, Bedford Row, and Chancery Lane. It was, in fact, in Bedford Row, in one of those old-fashioned houses with oak-panelled rooms, that the London agents of J. K. Watts had their offices.

II.

FIRST STEPS TOWARDS LITERARY LIFE IN LONDON.

II.

First Steps towards Literary Life in London (1870–72).

ABOUT this time an incident occurred that soon led to a complete change in Theodore Watts-Dunton's life. It happened during the bathing season at a certain town on the East Anglian coast that he made the acquaintance of a novelist at the Assembly Rooms—an acquaintance that ripened into friendship. Through this chance meeting can be indirectly traced Watts-Dunton's introduction to the Rossetti circle, which subsequently led to the famous companionship with Swinburne at The Pines.

Watts-Dunton met his new friend several times before he realized that he had formed the acquaintance of one of the best-known novelists of the day. The discovery came about in this wise. He happened one morning to take up a copy of the *Saturday Review* at his hotel; the number contained an appreciative notice of a novel by his friend, just published. The name of this writer was F. W. Robinson, author of *Grandmother's Money* and a number of other successful works of fiction.

F. W. Robinson was thoroughly acquainted, as Watts-Dunton was not long in discovering, with "Grub Street" life and its fraternity, being on intimate terms, indeed, with a number of leading Fleet Street journalists. A letter of his to Watts-Dunton, dated June 21, 1870, shows him busily occupied; for he says, "I must give up the *Daily News;* it unsettles my 'novel' ideas. . . . I shall go back presently to my old happy hunting-grounds. . . . I mean to make a push for an editorship of a new weekly magazine of my own pattern presently." *

And so it came about that the chance seaside acquaintance was destined to have a distinct influence in shaping the literary career of Theodore Watts-Dunton. He had never sufficiently recognized how "provincial" was his old native town, where a writer of considerable vogue among novel readers had been actually unknown to him even by name. Obviously his acquaintance with the author of *Grandmother's Money* was one to cultivate, and during his next stay in London he paid a visit to Robinson's house in Brixton. It was called "Elmore House," after the novelist's first published story, *The House of Elmore.* The two men soon grew intimate, and a lasting friendship sprang up between them.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Watts-Dunton

* This magazine, called *Home Chimes*, was published, and lived for some years, during the eighties. Robinson was proprietor and editor. In 1884 it was proposed that *Aylwin* should appear in it in serial form, but the project fell through.

presently opened his heart to Robinson touching his ambitious projects for winning a place in literature. He told his friend in confidence that he had written more than one novel, but had never yet attempted to "nobble a publisher;" and Robinson, in his good-natured way, asked to see some specimen of his friend's attempts at novel-writing—suggesting that, if found suitable, he would willingly submit the manuscript for consideration to his own publishers, for whom he was at that time acting as "reader."* Watts-Dunton readily expressed his willingness to submit his work to the test, and the manuscript of a novel was dispatched from St. Ives. Robinson read it with that businesslike promptitude which was one of his chief characteristics.

His verdict upon this literary effort was exceptionally favourable; he went so far as to offer to "negotiate" for its publication. But Watts-Dunton could not make up his mind as to what course to pursue—whether to accept or refuse. In this case a chance was given him—a chance, maybe, of seeing his dream of literary fame realized at one stroke.

> "In the reproof of chance
> Lies the true proof of men."

And yet he hesitated, and so it came about that he

* An obituary notice of F. W. Robinson, called "The Last of the Three Deckers," by Watts-Dunton, appeared in the *Athenæum*, December 14, 1901. For many years Watts-Dunton acted as Robinson's legal adviser, as he acted for Rossetti, Morris, Swinburne, and other literary friends.

let slip this opportunity, though he could not deny that his friend's alluring offer was difficult to decline. When pressed for a decisive answer he still wavered, but finally he declined—putting forward as an excuse for his refusal that in this novel he had failed to satisfy his artistic conscience. But he went on to confess that his decision was not arrived at without a still stronger reason: "he had another novel on the *tapis*, which he felt confident would be found to be a superior story in every respect to the one lately under consideration." This "superior story," as Robinson presently heard from the author, bore the ambitious title of *Balmoral: a Pendant to Lothair*, for in a letter addressed to Watts-Dunton at St. Ives, Robinson says:—

"Is it a sequel to *Lothair* or a satire on *Lothair?* I think it would *go* . . . it will be something new and pungent, I reckon. How long will it take to publish? Ay, there's the rub. If you are going to press with it on your own account, or with a London publisher, you must insist upon despatch. There is a story of a three-volume book being printed and published in three days, but three weeks could see it done if publishers were energetic. After the middle of July the libraries are slack; all the best books are supposed to be out by that time, or put off till October. I should like to read it before you have made up your mind to anything. I could tell, I fancy, if a publisher would be likely to buy it; and this would be a much better thing for you,

as the trade is a risky one, and the book business altogether in a bad way. Can't you send me the copy as far as you have gone? Never mind about 'fair' copy, and let me sit in judgment on the story concerning the merits of which I am sanguine, for know I not of what sterling stuff T. W. is made? . . . When are you coming to town? I should like to see you immensely, to talk of the novel and of your extraordinary dash into two volumes out of three since I last heard from you. Your hard work makes me shudder. Here, on the flat of my back in a shady corner of my study, let me congratulate you on your industry."

On July 12, 1870, Robinson writes: "I have read *Lothair*.* Ye gods, what a novel! What character, what marvellous incident, what a 'hoight of foine langwidge'! Is the 'pendant' ready? Everything depends on your striking before the *Lothair* fever has burned itself out. Vols. 1 and 2 should be printing while you are at Vol. 3, in a case of this kind. Work of another kind has not turned up, and made another torso of *Balmoral*, has it? I trust not.

"I think Lothair's last proposal to Corisande one of the richest and coolest of offers in modern fiction. I hardly wonder he has lived, after being impressed by every 'gal' in his way from the first chapter. . . .

* Lord Beaconsfield's *Lothair* was published in 1870. It is interesting to note that Robinson's letter about *Balmoral* was written twenty-eight years before *Aylwin* was published.

The rage for the novel, and the 'puffs,' make one's dander rise. I have not seen Blackwood's 'slasher,' but it would be a fair one. . . .

"All well at St. Ives I hope. I wait patiently for the New Novel by T. W."

Balmoral was presently dispatched to Robinson. Robinson's opinion of its merits was unequivocally favourable. "There is enough plot and characterization in it," he declared, "for a dozen novels."

This encouraging report met with the same response given with regard to the previous manuscript: nothing resulted. Whatever may have been the cause, whether it was that "other work turned up," as suggested by Robinson, "and made another torso of *Balmoral*," or whether, as before, he was overruled by force of "the artistic conscience," who shall decide? The latter reason would seem the most probable, for this novel was, at the time of his decease, still extant in its old manuscript form—the precise form in which it was read by his friend forty-five years before. Doubtless in this instance, as in every other instance in the days that followed those early days, the imaginative work he achieved never satisfied him—always fell short, in fact, of his lofty ideal of literary perfection. In his friend F. W. Robinson he had found an experienced writer of fiction, a man recognized by publishers as an excellent judge of the market value of a novel. In these circumstances there is good reason to conjecture

that had *Balmoral* been published at that propitious moment, while *Lothair* was in everybody's thoughts, it would in all likelihood have won for its author an enviable position in the literary world.

But the author of *Balmoral*, whether he realized or not that he was letting a prize slip from his grasp, refused, as before, to listen to persuasion. He let twenty-eight years go by following upon this period, and in fact he reached the mature age of sixty-six before he decided—reluctantly even then—to publish a novel. Indeed, after having toiled over *Aylwin* intermittently for more than twenty years, he was heard to say, on the very day upon which he parted with the last slips, "If I had only kept back the proofs for another month, what a masterpiece I could have made of this novel!"

After his meeting with F. W. Robinson, Watts-Dunton began to visit London at shorter intervals. The inducements for these visits were becoming stronger every year. His vivacious brother, Eugene, was a successful solicitor in London; one of his sisters had recently married (1870) the junior partner in the house of his father's agents, Mason and Sons, solicitors in Bedford Row; and his favourite uncle, Orlando Watts, occupied an important position in a large legal firm in Buckingham Street, Strand. In addition to these family links between London and St. Ives, a far stronger inducement for widening and cementing his connection with London was the decline of his father's business at St. Ives. Conveyancing was not the lucrative affair

it had been in his younger days, when he began to take an active part in legal matters; competitors had greatly increased, and the large fees of former days no longer obtained. In fact, the prospect of inheriting the remunerative business anticipated by father and son, in the first instance, seemed to be getting somewhat problematical. At this very moment his brother Eugene, the London solicitor, died suddenly at his house at Sydenham, from heart-trouble contracted from rheumatic fever in early life, and there is little doubt that the death of this favourite brother influenced him as much as anything else in his decision to quit St. Ives and start practising for himself as a solicitor in London. This decision, however, was not immediately carried into effect. He divided his time between severing his legal connections with St. Ives and seeking in London for a new set of clients. Indeed, it was during one of these lengthy business visits to the metropolis in search of clients that his noteworthy introduction into the Rossetti circle took place. It changed the entire course of his career, and finally decided him in his choice of London as a permanent home.

III.

GORDON HAKE AND DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

III.

Gordon Hake and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1872–74).

WHILE posting a letter in Putney High Street early one morning, Watts-Dunton encountered his father's old friend Dr. R. G. Latham,* who lived close by; and Latham proposed that they should go for a stroll across Wimbledon Common in search of sundews. The walk led them in the direction of Dr. Gordon Hake's house in Kingston Vale. Latham was a friend of Hake's, and seized the opportunity of introducing Watts-Dunton; for he had lent him a copy of Hake's book *The World's Epitaph*—a book which Watts-Dunton had quite recently read, casually expressing to Latham a wish to meet the author.

This meeting was the means of bringing Watts-Dunton into touch with Rossetti, and consequently with the whole of that famous circle of artists and men of letters among whom the "mysterious poet-painter of Cheyne Walk" was at the time the most distinguished. Watts-Dunton himself recorded in after years how he

* For obituary notice by T. Watts-Dunton of R. G. Latham, vide *Athenæum*, March 17, 1888.

came to meet Dr. Gordon Hake, and how that meeting had an immense influence upon the whole of his future career.* But he has also told us in a critical essay in the *Athenæum*, when reviewing *Memoirs of Eighty Years*, how Gordon Hake chanced to meet Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

"Rossetti's almost accidental introduction to Hake at an important period of the former's life," to quote Watts-Dunton's own words, "has always been regarded by the poet-painter's own family as one of the greatest blessings of his life and theirs. This is how it came about." He then goes on to relate how, before Rossetti had painted his first picture, Gordon Hake was familiar with all the best society in England, France, and Italy. His studies on the Continent ran in two parallel lines—artistic and scientific. He knew Trelawney and Landor, whom he met, among others of literary fame, at Florence in 1831. In art he had something new to tell the world about the secret of "pose" and the following of the drapery in antique sculpture; in science he had formed theories so startling at that time as to be alarming, though they are now sufficiently familiar to us all under the name of "evolution" and "the survival of the fittest."

On his return from the Continent, Hake brought with him an unfinished romance called *Valdarno, or*

* Vide *Old Familiar Faces*. (Herbert Jenkins, 1915.)



the Ordeal of Art Worship, into which he introduced some of his ideas upon ancient art. Being at that time friendly with Harrison Ainsworth, and also with the Landseers, all of whom had turned to art, he was invited by Ainsworth to publish the story in *Ainsworth's Magazine*, to be illustrated by one of Edwin Landseer's brothers. This was done, and instalments of a romance as original as anything of Blake's began to appear in that journal.

While the ordinary reader of *Ainsworth's Magazine* stood bewildered before such a work, there were a few who were fascinated by it. Among these latter was a young artist and poet as yet almost unknown in London, who was in the habit of reading the magazines and newspapers in a coffee-house in the vicinity of Fleet Street. His eyes one day fell upon an engraving by Landseer, the like of which, as regards subject, he had never seen before. After studying this remarkable production, he turned to the text, and found that to be still more remarkable. Month after month he hurried to the coffee-house to read a fresh instalment. This young artist was Dante Rossetti. He now wrote to Gordon Hake inquiring whether *Valdarno* was an original work or a translation from an Italian romance, though, as Rossetti himself admitted to Watts-Dunton in after years, he never regarded it as a translation, but used this subterfuge as an excuse for writing. Years passed away, and while Hake remained obscure, Rossetti had become famous. But Gordon Hake had now de-

termined to tempt Fate with a volume of poetry—*Madeline and Other Poems*—and as his old literary friends had all passed away, with the exception of Borrow (who refused to read a line of any poet later than Scott), he yearned for a friend to consult as to the present method of publication. He recalled to mind the letter he had received from Rossetti, and being quite unaware that the poet-painter was at that time the most exclusive man in London, he boldly rapped at the door in Cheyne Walk—that door at which even old friends of Rossetti's were half afraid to rap. Many have had the good fortune of hearing this famous interview described by Gordon Hake on the one hand and by Rossetti on the other—each among the most original humorists of our time. Watts-Dunton has often described that meeting as told to him by D. G. Rossetti himself.

When Rossetti found that the quiet, dignified Englishman who towered benignly over his head was the author of the "weird and wonderful" romance *Valdarno*, and that he had come to answer in person the letter written so many years before, he was conquered, and received his new friend with open arms. An intimacy of the closest kind was the result." *

* "I was received by Rossetti very warmly; so much so," says Gordon Hake, in his *Memoirs of Eighty Years*, "that he accepted my invitation to dine with me at Roehampton on the next day, and many hours were passed in conversation of the most exhilarating kind." On that occasion Gordon Hake read a number of scenes from his long poem *Madeline*, to which Rossetti sat listening with keen attention. So genuine, indeed, was his

Soon after that visit from Rossetti to Roehampton the poet-painter wrote to Gordon Hake, saying, "I should like to ask some of my friends to meet you at dinner." It was a large gathering, one of the largest ever seen at Cheyne Walk, and the principal guests on that occasion were Joseph Knight, Dr. Franz Hueffer, Rossetti's brother, Westland Marston, and Ford Madox Brown.

Watts-Dunton and Gordon Hake had come together about a year before this meeting between the "Parable Poet"* and the "Poet-Painter," and there was no one whom Gordon Hake talked about in the Rossetti circle so much as he talked about "Theodore Watts," so impressed had he become with Watts-Dunton's erudition, his remarkable literary instinct, and his brilliant talk upon most subjects. He fell into the habit, in fact, of quoting his "encyclopædic friend" on nearly every topic that chanced to crop up in conversation. This habit of his led Rossetti, with his lively sense of humour, to refer at last to "Theodore Watts" as the "Oraculum of the hayfield." Gordon Hake's reiterated eulogies of the "Oraculum" at last roused Rossetti's curiosity.

Surely, if Watts-Dunton had made his own particular choice of the man whom he wished above all others to introduce him to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, he would have

appreciation of *Madeline* that he wrote a review of it in the *Academy*. This was in 1871. Watts-Dunton was also a great admirer of this dramatic poem.

* *Parables and Tales*, by T. Gordon Hake. New edition. (Elkin Mathews, 1916.)

selected Gordon Hake, at this moment Rossetti's closest friend.

No better test of Watts-Dunton's magnetism—his extraordinary tact and personal charm—could have been found than the crucial one: his first interview did not prove a fiasco. For this was the distressful period which Rossetti's brother has described as the "parting of the waters" in Dante Rossetti's life,* and Rossetti was peculiarly hard to approach.

From the day on which they became acquainted, Rossetti ceased to speak in ironical terms of "Theodore Watts." But months went by before he found in him that "friend of friends" who came to understand those subtle and cryptic sides of Rossetti's nature which few, if any, of his other friends seemed ever able to fathom.

At the beginning of the year 1872—only a few months before Rossetti's first meeting with Watts-Dunton—that half-forgotten affair of the Buchanan pamphlet, called *The Fleshly School of Poetry*, was published.† From the moment when this pamphlet appeared and began to work upon his highly-strung temperament, Rossetti was an altered man; and so he continued to the last day of his life—ten years later. He was the victim of chloral, and had been for years, and this drug working perniciously upon strained nerves, had thrown him into a state of hypochondria. The symptoms were, in fact, those of intense disquietude acting upon the brain of a

* See W. M. Rossetti's *Letters and Memoirs*, Vol. I., p. 303.

† First printed in the *Contemporary Review* (October 1871).



highly-imaginative poet. The Buchanan affair had disturbed the mental balance as any other powerful incentive might have done when the mind was overwrought by large and frequent doses of chloral—resulting in deep melancholy and weakness of will.*

A prolonged visit to Scotland at this time, however, led to a remarkable change in Rossetti's condition. "It is a pleasant spot, with a walk into Crieff by the river-side down to a wilderness of waters; and there is plenty of mountain scenery in view," Gordon Hake wrote to Watts-Dunton in August 1872 from Trowan. "Rossetti is rapidly improving in health, stumping his way over long areas of path and road, with his thick stick in hand, but holding no intercourse with Nature." †

By this time Watts-Dunton had formed a close friendship with Gordon Hake, and his visits to Hake's house at Roehampton were very frequent. On one of these visits Watts-Dunton began to expatiate upon the difficulty that budding novelists experience in securing a publisher. With an air of mystery in his manner, he presently touched upon the subject of a novel in manuscript which a friend of his had lent him to read, with a request for a candid criticism. The dinner-party on that evening was composed of the doctor and his

* See *Letters and Memoirs*, pp. 287, 309.

† It has been stated by Mr. James Douglas, in his volume *Theodore Watts-Dunton: Poet, Novelist, Critic*, that Dr. Gordon Hake acted as Rossetti's physician. This is a misconception. Gordon Hake retired from practice some ten years before he met Rossetti.

two sons; and Watts-Dunton led his three friends to infer from his talk that he had read the story himself with peculiar interest. In fact, the more he talked about it the more did he rouse their curiosity. He had promised to spend the day at Roehampton on the following Sunday, and Gordon Hake urged him to bring the manuscript with him. He consented, at the same time giving his friends very pointedly to understand that he was not at liberty to disclose the author's name; and this naturally increased the eagerness of every one present to hear the story read.

The reading of the opening chapters of this novel in manuscript was given with a keen sense of dramatic effect, and made a deep impression. But before Watts-Dunton had finished, the doctor began to entertain a shrewd notion as to the authorship. It was not, however, until Watts-Dunton had bid his friends good-night that his audience ventured to cast an inquiring glance into each other's faces to find out whether each of them had come to the same conclusion. The merry laugh that resulted convinced them that on this point there was complete unanimity. A mock round-robin (a document still preserved by his sister, Miss Theresa Watts) was posted to Watts-Dunton on the following day, charging him with the authorship. The discovery excited a good deal of badinage, which no one could have taken in better part than did the unmasked author. Of course not a single word of the manuscript was in his own handwriting. It had been copied in the neat

handwriting of a near relative. It was not from any recognition of the caligraphy, therefore, that the clue to the author had been discovered. Those chapters written and read in manuscript were the opening chapters of *Aylwin*.

A short time before the sudden and unexpected journey of Dante Rossetti into Scotland, Gordon Hake had invited a number of literary friends to a garden party at his Roehampton house. In his forced absence from home on a visit to Rossetti the duties of host devolved upon his eldest son, Thomas Hake. Much to his relief, Watts-Dunton, who had just arrived at Putney from St. Ives, came across to Roehampton, and accepted an invitation to stay there for a few days and assist Gordon Hake's young son in facing the ordeal of the garden party during the absence of his father. Watts-Dunton proved a brilliant acquisition; and it was on this occasion that he met many of those famous men in literature and art, such as Ford Madox Brown, Westland Marston, Franz Hueffer, and others, with whom afterwards he came to be on such intimate terms.

IV.

AT KELMSCOTT.

IV.

At Kelmscott (1872–74).

NO sooner had Rossetti settled down at Kelmscott after his beneficial sojourn at Crieff than Watts-Dunton went there on his first visit to the poet-painter at this picturesque old manor house.

Kelmscott is a seventeenth-century building, at that time in the joint occupancy of Rossetti and Morris. It is a rare example of antiquity, with its many gables and its massive gray walls, the windows having square casements with stone mullions. From the front of the house there is an extensive view of meadow-land, and the garden is mostly remarkable for its yew-tree hedges cut in fantastic shapes.

This visit of Watts-Dunton's to Kelmscott was made the occasion for advising with Rossetti upon an affair that required delicate handling. Watts-Dunton had been introduced into the Pre-Raphaelite circle not merely as a man of literary attainments, but as a skilled lawyer; and the affair in question bore reference to a forgery of Dante Rossetti's name on a cheque by one against whom Rossetti, for private reasons, shrank from taking legal action.

The matter was soon settled, and in a way that satisfied Rossetti; for in a letter to his brother, dated from Kelmscott Manor, September 1872, he writes: "I am happy to say that, through Mr. Watts's friendly offices, the cheque business seems in a fair way of being quashed."

Rossetti, whose lively sense of gratitude was characteristic of the man, appreciated the adroit manner in which Watts-Dunton settled the affair of the forged cheque, and the newly-formed acquaintance rapidly developed into friendship.

Watts-Dunton had not been many hours at the manor house before he began to realize the truth of Gordon Hake's remarks in the letter to him some months before while with Rossetti in Scotland, that he would find the poet-painter surprisingly devoid of that interest in Nature one usually looks for in an artist.

Indeed, during those two years' residence at Kelmscott—from 1872 to 1874—where Watts-Dunton was a frequent visitor, the contrast between his own nature-loving mind and the art-loving mind of Rossetti was so obvious that the poet-painter one day remarked to his friend, as he looked round him with the sun shining over the meadows and the river: "I sometimes wish that I had your passion for Nature. It's a great loss being born in a big city, where my youth was passed—a great loss. Nature has to be learnt as you began to learn it in your childhood

at St. Ives, as I began to learn art in my youth in London." *

Yet even an appeal from such a Nature-worshipper as Watts-Dunton in his sonnet, *The Shadow on the Window Blind*, in which he calls upon Rossetti, seated at work beside his lamp, to join him in the moonlit garden at Kelmscott, and " drink the dews sweeter than wine of fame," could inspire only a momentary response.†

The art-loving mind of Rossetti, Watts-Dunton soon discovered, was more active in the Kelmscott studio than in the sunny meadows that surrounded it on every side.

As a natural consequence, the most frequented room in the old manor house was Rossetti's Tapestry Room, as the studio was called, with its quaint old furniture, and walls everywhere covered with pictures, more especially with chalk drawings of female heads. At first sight it is said to have made rather an unfavourable impression upon the tenant, for the tapestry, of no artistic value, depicted a bewildering story of Samson,

* To some extent, indeed, the influence of Watts-Dunton at this " Kelmscott period " did apparently lead to a closer observation of Nature on Rossetti's part. It is seen in *Sunset Wings*, written at Kelmscott; for this poem " embodies a habit of the starlings," to use Rossetti's own words, " most beautiful and interesting in summer and autumn." But, as a matter of fact, to a poet like Rossetti, Nature brought no solace; *Sunset Wings* expressed merely a passing mood.

† Watts-Dunton's sonnet, *The Shadow on the Window Blind*, which appears in *Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century*, was, through an oversight, not included in *The Coming of Love*.

not easy to piece together. In fact, the irresistible impulse to puzzle out the biblical sequence of incidents proved somewhat depressing to an artist of Rossetti's temperament.

"Speculation as to the meaning of incredible passages of drawings and detail becomes after a time so wearisome and so unavoidable, whatever one's train of thought," he once remarked to Watts-Dunton, "that I should cover this tapestry up if I knew how. If taken down it might go to pieces!"

This very tapestry, however, William Morris insisted, gave an air of romance to the room. More satisfying in its romantic suggestion was the view from the south window, where you could get not only a glimpse of the Thames with its meadows of clover and the elm-covered hill beyond, but see a picturesque barn, and the dovecot, and the flank of the earlier house, with its little gables and gray scaled roofs.

In his autobiographical "Notes" on his visits to Kelmscott, Watts-Dunton remarks:—

"I cannot recall without a thrill of mingled emotions a delightful stay of mine at Kelmscott in the summer of '73, when Rossetti's mother, whose age then was seventy-three, used to read out to us all sorts of things in English, Italian, and French. And writing these words makes me hear those readings again

—makes me hear, through the open casement of the quaint old house, the blackbirds from the home field trying in vain to rival the music of that half-Italian, half-English voice."

Rossetti's talk when at his easel was extraordinarily good. At the time of Watts-Dunton's first visit, the poet-painter was deeply interested in Dumas. He had taken down to Kelmscott a complete edition of the novels in French—the well-known edition in green covers. He persuaded himself that every one of them was written by the great romancer, and it was delightful to hear him talking about one Dumas novel after another, showing an intimate knowledge of the plot and characters in each. While talking he was very much given to using the expression *mon cher*, which, as he confessed, he had caught from a French painter, who always began his remarks in this style when in a chaffing mood. And what splendid artistic work he produced while at his easel during those memorable days in the "tapestry room"! It was there that *Proserpine* was achieved. "This promises to be my best picture," he once said to Watts-Dunton while standing over it, palette and paint brush in hand.

It was a constant source of wonder to every one—especially to Watts-Dunton, who was sensitive to interruption when over his literary work—that Rossetti, while talking and laughing, was achieving masterpieces in art. And yet Rossetti, if in his most genial mood

in his studio, proved a scarcely less fascinating companion at the table or out for a walk through the meadows by the riverside. He had at times, however, fits of deep depression, when he would roll about in a restless manner on the big sofa covered with holland, lost in thought, seemingly quite unconscious of any one's presence.

Watts-Dunton witnessed many examples of Rossetti's sense of humour, which he made use of in *Aylwin*. And in this novel he has said of D'Arcy, who is, of course, Rossetti to the life, that "when his spirits were at the highest he was without an equal as a wit, without an equal as a humorist." Rossetti confessed to Watts-Dunton that before the loss of his wife, even in the days when his animal spirits were at times almost boisterous, he was occasionally subject to periods of great depression—or, rather, periods of *ennui*. At such moments painting, reading, or writing became essential until this sense of deep depression fled. He had not the precious faculty, possessed on occasion by some poetic minds, of "letting the world slide." In this respect he was wholly unlike his friend Morris, whose power of self-detachment was as remarkable as Gladstone's. Morris could put aside all the worries of preoccupation attaching to any work as soon as he had left that particular work for some other phase of activity. Therein lay the secret of his amazing thoroughness. He brought a fresh unruffled mind to the consideration of the fresh project. Rossetti's



more brooding temperament could not do this. The worry, the irritation, the regret, remained like a ground swell long after the storm had passed; and upon its troubled waters other matters were tossed restlessly about.

One day the studio was unceremoniously invaded by Rossetti's housekeeper—a somewhat querulous person—while the poet-painter was standing at his easel engaged in a talk about his beloved Dumas with Watts-Dunton.* She came in with some trivial complaint about the want of respect towards her on the part of the domestics. Rossetti flew into a rage, but presently calming down told the woman to send the servants upstairs into the studio. When they had assembled, he ordered them to stand in a row. This order having been obeyed, with the housekeeper at their head, he read them a moral lecture of a serio-comic nature which soon set them laughing, and in this way he managed to establish perfect harmony in the region below stairs.

If in the hero Chiaro dell' Erma in *Hand and Soul* Rossetti has revealed something of his own personality in its earlier phases, the delineation of the artist D'Arcy in Watts-Dunton's novel, *Aylwin*, is an even more intimate revelation of the man during the riper and more fascinating years of his artistic and literary life at Kelmscott Manor.

* Rossetti's housekeeper at Kelmscott is described in *Aylwin* as Mrs. Titwing—a prosaic figure, the very embodiment of British commonplace, exhaling the commonplace perfume of scented soap.

In that tapestry room, Watts-Dunton had every opportunity of studying Rossetti's appearance. He has confessed that the artist's face never appeared to him a handsome one. It was "the expression," to use Watts-Dunton's own words, "that gave a unity of beauty to it as a whole." That expression was the expression of genius—"an imperious magnetism." He has further remarked that "so perfect in form was Rossetti's forehead, with the thin crop of dark hair curling round the temples, which were partly bald, that it seemed greatly to enhance the attractiveness of the other features." The eyes he has described—almost always seen through powerful glasses—as being of a colour between hazel and blue-gray, with lights shining within them, "indescribable lights, that were neither gray nor hazel, nor blue, moving and alive in the deeps of the pupils." He was also greatly struck with Rossetti's voice. "In whatever assembly that voice was heard, its indescribable resonance distinguished it from all other voices: it awakened an eagerness on the part of the listener to catch the sound; it seemed to draw one towards him."*

"It is unfortunate that G. F. Watts's picture (now in the National Portrait Gallery) was never finished, and I seldom saw upon Rossetti's face the dull, heavy expression which that portrait wears. The poet told me that he had given the painter only one or two sittings. As to the photographs,

* *Autobiographical Notes.*

none of them is really satisfactory," Watts-Dunton said.*

That tapestry room at Kelmscott was doubly famous; for, after 1874—when Rossetti returned to Cheyne Walk—this Rossetti studio became Morris's room, which he always used when in the mood for writing poetry.

It was in the tapestry studio, on the occasion of one of these visits to Kelmscott, that Watts-Dunton read the early chapters of *Aylwin* to Rossetti; for he had been told that the "Oraculum of the hayfield" was "given to novel-spinning," among his other mental activities. As a matter of fact, the incident in connection with the manuscript at Gordon Hake's house at Roehampton having reached Rossetti's ears, had roused his curiosity. Watts-Dunton, in his natural desire to do full justice to his work, read the chapters in his best style. But the story failed to interest Rossetti. He confessed, with his usual candour in criticism, that he perceived little or no merit in the work: he even admitted that the treatment was distasteful to him, and it could only be classed, in his opinion, beside the sensational fiction usually to be found in magazines of the *London Journal* stamp.† Watts-Dunton, however, though discouraged by his failure to win approval,

* G. F. Watts's unfinished portrait was painted in 1871, when D. G. Rossetti was forty-three years of age.

† The novelist and poet, Thomas Miller, now forgotten, much of whose work appeared in the *London Journal*, was greatly admired by D. G. Rossetti.

soon discovered that the basis of Rossetti's criticism was intensely whimsical, when he eventually told him the reason why the novel did not appeal to him—his unconquerable dislike to the introduction of cripples into works of fiction. This prejudice, he went on to admit, had had its origin in a novel he had read by Wilkie Collins, in which a cripple is introduced. Although Rossetti's verdict on *Aylwin* caused Watts-Dunton some disappointment—it even brought the thought to his mind to destroy the manuscript—when he came to consider Rossetti's state of health, the verdict ceased to give him any deep concern. Undoubtedly, the first draft of *Aylwin* was written in a style that justified very considerably Rossetti's criticism. Watts-Dunton, though he resented the criticism, probably felt that it was not wholly unjust. Certainly *Aylwin* improved vastly in the earlier revisions; though whether the *Aylwin* vintage did not become over-mature in time is another matter. However, it must not be supposed, though the opening chapters of *Aylwin* failed to appeal to Rossetti, that other work by Watts-Dunton met with a similar fate. He was extremely impressed by some of Watts-Dunton's sonnets. So inspired was he by the *motif* of *The Spirit of the Rainbow*, as we know, that he chose it as the subject for one of his pictures.*

Both Rossetti and Watts-Dunton had in common

* This picture, here reproduced, which has a place on the walls in the drawing-room at The Pines, is the only nude form that Rossetti ever drew.

a passionate love of animals, though Rossetti's taste in this respect was not only passionate but bizarre. To begin with, dogs of all kinds overran the place. There was a sheep-dog named "Turvy;" a dog from Scotland, a cross between a deerhound and a collie, named "Bess;" and a dog of remarkable intelligence called "Dizzy," so named after the Prime Minister in the days of this black-and-tan terrier's puppyhood. This little animal, a present to Rossetti from Gordon Hake, was a source of constant amusement to Watts-Dunton. The mention of "Dizzy" would up to his last days bring a smile to his face. Endless are the anecdotes about the terrier and his doings at Kelmscott.

One evening "Dizzy" was curled up on the rug sound asleep before the studio fire. When roused at bedtime he expressed his resentment, biting one of the guests in the thumb. He was thereupon taken into the cellar and locked up for the night. Next morning, when he came trotting into the breakfast-room as though nothing had happened, he was received with shouts of obloquy. Cowed by this unexpected reception, he turned tail and fled. On his venturing to reappear at dinnertime he was instantly seized, tied to a leg of the piano, and subjected to the torture of seeing "Turvy" demolish three "courses" of beef and macaroni under his very nose. The poor little terrier was, indeed, treated on these occasions more like a naughty child than a dumb animal; but it must be conceded that if Rossetti and some of his guests teased "Dizzy" at times

to a merciless extent, no dog was ever more spoilt. He was, indeed, the most pampered among the animals at Kelmscott, or even at Cheyne Walk, as references to him in books about the Rossetti circle clearly show.

Another animal scarcely less petted at Kelmscott was "Mousie," the pony which William Morris brought with him from Iceland, a fat and stolid animal, "more like Sancho's donkey than anything equine. And," as Rossetti used to say, "he never ceases to eat!" On one occasion, however, he was seen from the manor window standing in his field—a paddock known as Mousie's Field—in profound rumination, with his back to a tree, greatly to Rossetti's amusement.

If Watts-Dunton wanted still further proof of his friend's love of animals, there were the young owls in their nests in the attics amongst the great timbers of the roof. The snoring of these owls suggested to Rossetti the sound of ghostly moans; for he had from boyhood shown a remarkable taste for the supernatural, and nothing delighted him more—especially at midnight—than to mount the stairs leading to the "haunted garrets," as he loved to call them, in company with Watts-Dunton or any other guest who chanced to be staying at Kelmscott Manor, to listen to the weird noises Indeed, when the moonbeams chanced to be looking through those attic windows, lighting up every corner, the place really did seem haunted. One of these young owls, after doing duty as "a ghost," was

taken from the nest, and, of course, became as great a favourite as the persecuted "Dizzy" or the overfed Iceland pony.

At the time Watts-Dunton was staying at Kelmscott, Rossetti penned one of his characteristic letters to his mother about the captured fledgling. "You will be amused to hear," he wrote, "that we have got a little tame owl. He was quite young when caught in a nest with two others, and so covered with a sort of furry moss that I christened him 'Mossy.' We keep him upstairs in an attic, where he begins now to fly about. . . . Sometimes he comes down to meals and sits on the table. One can stroke him and handle him, and I suppose he will remain quite tame." *

Watts-Dunton found the old manor house and its quaint surroundings to be as romantic as any poet or novelist could well desire, and he did not fail, as we all know, to utilize all these experiences later on for literary purposes. The solitary walks for miles along the river banks, with the greenest of meadows on one side, and on the other side lofty elms, brought to mind recollections of the early days at St. Ives, and reawakened his poetic aspirations. "A haunt of ancient peace," as Rossetti, who delighted in this Thames-side retreat, was never tired of reiterating.

Watts-Dunton's favourite walk with Rossetti was along the river bank, in the direction of the weir. There

* Vide *Letters and Memoir*, by W. M. Rossetti.

they would sit down upon a fallen willow tree, the inside of which was all touchwood.*

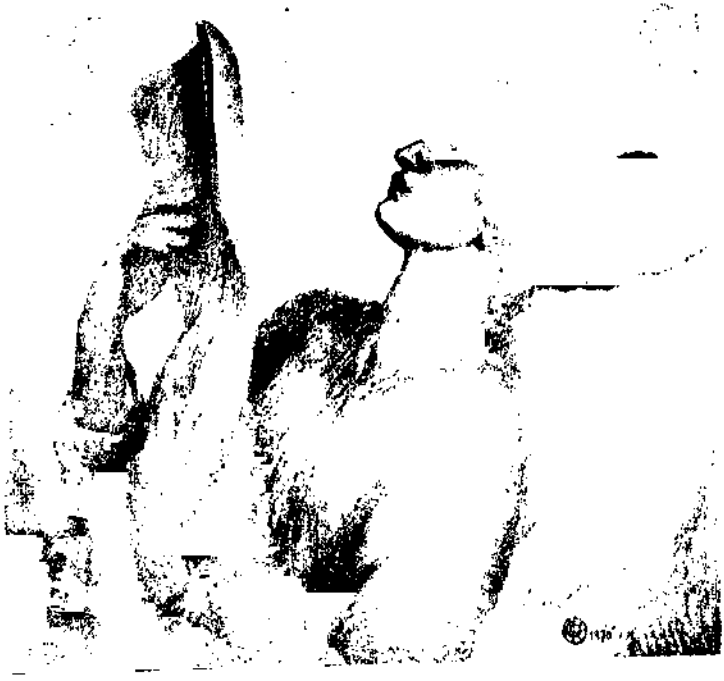
Watts-Dunton's reference in *Aylwin* to the meadows at Kelmscott is only one among numerous descriptions of the place in this novel.

"Oh, what a lovely afternoon it was! A Welsh afternoon could not have been lovelier. The sun, shining on the buttercups and the gray-tufted standing grass, made the meadow look as though covered with a tapestry that shifted from gray to lavender, and then from lavender to gold, as the soft breeze moved over it. And many of the birds were still in full song; and brilliant as was the music of the skylarks, the blackbirds and thrushes were so numerous that the music falling from the sky seemed caught and swallowed up by the music rising from the hedgerows and trees."

Some of Rossetti's finest poems were written in the meadows at Kelmscott and by the riverside.

* This weir, to which Morris refers in his *News from Nowhere*, is fully described in one of Gordon Hake's sonnets in *The New Day*:—

"How often did we trace the nestling Thames
From humblest waters on his course of might,
Down where the weir the bursting current stems;
There sat till evening grew to balmy night,
Veiling the weir whose roar recalled the strand
Where we had listened to the wave-lipped sea,
That seemed to utter plaudits while we planned
Triumphal labours of the day to be."



It is the "Holmscote" of Rossetti's beautiful lyric, *Down Stream*, which originally appeared in *The Dark Blue*, illustrated by one of Madox Brown's most powerful dramatic designs :—

"Between Holmscote and Hurstcote
The river reaches wind ;
The whispering trees accept the breeze,
The ripples cool and kind."

It is also the scene of some of the sketches in Hake's *New Symbols*:—

"These grey-mossed tiles still 'neath it scorch ;
The glare and shade still side by side
Aslant the mullioned casements glide
From yon old gable to the porch.

* * * * *

"Transparent isles of rushes bind
The river's light with bars of green
That catch the water's blue between
To where it darkens in the wind."

Then it is the scene of Watts-Dunton's poem, *The Mirrored Stars Again*, a sonnet with a refrain which Rossetti frequently quoted as very striking :—

"The mirrored stars lit all the bulrush-spears,
And all the flags and broad-leaved lily-isles ;
The ripples shook the stars to golden smiles,
Then smoothed them back to happy golden spheres.
We rowed, we sang—her voice seemed in mine ears
An angel's, yet with woman's dearer wiles ;
But shadows fell from gathering cloudy piles,
And ripples shook the stars to fiery tears.

" What shaped those shadows like another boat
Where Rhona sat, and he Love made a liar ?
There, where the *Scollard* sank, I saw it float,
While ripples shook the stars to symbols dire ;
We wept, we kissed, while starry fingers wrote,
And ripples shook the stars to a snake of fire."

In a word, all the literary and artistic work achieved at that " old manor house of many gables "—all the learned talk on mediæval art among those famous Pre-Raphaelites and their equally famous guests ; the graphic descriptions of Kelmscott in poetry and in prose—in *The New Day*, in *Aylwin*, in *News from Nowhere*, and other works—if linked together with appropriate details by those who, like William Morris, knew every nook and corner of the place and its Thames-side surroundings, would easily fill a goodly volume. As Watts-Dunton has pathetically remarked in an article in the *Athenæum* on *News from Nowhere :* " This beloved house, known as Kelmscott Manor, Morris could not bear to destroy with other reminiscences of the past. In truth," he concludes, " it never can be destroyed, for it has been made doubly immortal by Rossetti's genius and Morris's own."

One day, when Rossetti and Watts-Dunton were walking in the fields, Rossetti mentioned that Morris was coming down for a day's fishing, and that " Mousie," the Icelandic pony, whose permanent home was Kelmscott, was to be sent to the Lechlade railway station to meet him. This was his first sight of William Morris, and

" ' You are now going to be introduced to my fellow-

Did Mr. Dunton give this account of the meeting.

partner,' said Rossetti, 'and I shall tell him about our joint undertaking, just to hear what Top will say.'

"At that time I only knew of the famous firm—Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Company—by name, and I asked Rossetti for an explanation, which he gave in his usual incisive way.

"'Well,' said he, 'one evening a lot of us were together, and we got talking about the way in which artists did all kinds of things in olden times, designed every kind of decoration and most kinds of furniture, and some one suggested—as a lark more than anything else—that we should each put down five pounds and form a company. Fivers were blossoms of a rare growth among us in those days, and I won't swear that the table rustled with fivers. Anyhow, the firm was formed; but of course there was no deed or anything of that kind. In fact, it was a mere playing at business, and Topsy' (he always spoke of Morris as *Topsy* or *Top*) 'was elected manager, not because we ever dreamed that he would turn out a man of business, but because he was the only one among us who had both time and money to spare. We had no idea whatever of commercial success, but it has succeeded almost in our own despite. Top's very eccentricities and independent attitude towards his patrons seem to have drawn patrons round him.'

"And then he told me of Morris's interview with a certain eminent Churchman, which convulsed me with laughter.

"'Here comes the manager,' said he. 'You must mind your p's and q's with him; he is a wonderfully stand-off chap, and generally takes against people.'

"'What is he like?' I said.

"'Like?' said Rossetti meditatively. 'You know the portrait of Francis I.? Well, take that portrait as the basis of what you would call your "mental image" of the manager's face, soften down the nose a bit, and give him the rose-bloom colour of an English farmer, and there you have Top.'

"'What about King Francis's eyes? A poet must have eyes,' I said.

"'Well, Topsy's are not quite so small as Francis's, but they are very little—blue-gray—but they see everything.'

"And then I saw, coming towards us, on a rough, long-haired, mouse-coloured pony so diminutive that he well deserved the name of 'Mousie,' the figure of a man in a wideawake—a figure so broad and square that the breeze at his back seemed to be using him as a sail, and blowing both him and the pony towards us.

"When Rossetti introduced me, the 'manager' greeted him with a 'H'm! I thought you were alone.' This did not seem promising.

"But the ice was soon broken by Rossetti.

"'Let me introduce you to my new partner, Top,' said he.

"Morris evidently thought that this was a joking reference to the firm, which was rather burdened with partners.

"'Partner! Don't you think there are too many partners already?'

"'A literary partner, I mean,' said Rossetti. And then he told him about our project.

"I don't know why, but this set me laughing. That involuntary laugh of mine seemed to be a link between us. And then the charm of William Morris began, and grew upon me, day by day, until he died. The shy manager astonished Rossetti by at once fraternizing with me, and inviting me, a stranger, to join the fishing, which I did."

The chief links of sympathy between Watts-Dunton and Morris when they first met at Kelmscott were their love of Nature and their admiration of George Borrow, of whose books Morris was a frequent reader.

Angling, indeed, was the only form of sport in which Morris took any interest, and it was his delight at all seasons to run down to Kelmscott, if only for a day's fishing, and still more to cook the fish he caught. Besides, at Kelmscott his intense passion for Nature was fully satisfied. "I love the earth through that small space of it," he said, whenever speaking of Kelmscott to his friends. But above everything he loved a swim in the Thames when staying at the old manor house.

"We came to the river above the weir," says Morris, "and there we had a delightful swim in the broad piece of water above the lock, where the river looked much

bigger than its natural size from its being dammed up by the weir."

Morris delighted in the blackbirds at Kelmscott: they sang there, he liked to think, after they had ceased to sing elsewhere. He often amused Watts-Dunton with his childish way of breaking out into a passion when fishing at the riverside, using all the violent expressions out of his voluminous vocabulary if any slight incident upset him, such as the fishing tackle becoming "mixed," through the hook getting entangled in the weeds. The anger, however, never lasted more than a few minutes with Morris; the next moment he would be laughing at his own extravagant outburst.

It was at Kelmscott that Watts-Dunton met John Henry Middleton, perhaps as close a friend as Morris ever had. He was a man of whom Watts-Dunton often spoke as one of the finest scholars he ever encountered, and at the manor house they became intimate. Morris had met Middleton during his second journey to Iceland. It was the beginning of a long friendship. They both took an intense interest in mediæval art—a great bond of sympathy between them. Middleton died when comparatively young, and Morris has said, "We had much in common as to our view of things and the world, and his friendliness to his friends was beyond measure."

At the moment of his taking leave, when this first memorable visit to Kelmscott came to an end, Rossetti wrote describing Watts-Dunton as "a first-rate com-

panion and a first-rate fellow; with sterling qualities and cultivation," in a letter to his friend and former master, the "Father of the Pre-Raphaelites," Ford Madox Brown.

Although Watts-Dunton came to be on close terms of friendship with William Morris, it was never an intimacy that could be compared with the Rossetti or Swinburne *camaraderie*. He went on frequent sojourns to Kelmscott, especially in the days after Rossetti's death, and was always a welcome guest. In the summer, before taking his holiday with Swinburne, he would often go on a visit to the manor house, especially at the season when the roses were just beginning to blossom and the garden most lovely. And Morris, who always expressed pleasure at the thought of his visit to Kelmscott, would say: "Come whenever you can; we are very glad of your company."

To the house at Hammersmith—Kelmscott House—Watts-Dunton went frequently, though Morris (as every one of his friends—no one more than his friend and secretary, Mr. S. C. Cockerell *—fully realized) was almost always so immersed in the art of fashioning poetry that he could spare but little time for the literary *tête-à-tête* that Watts-Dunton loved above all things.

Morris's happiest moments, as Watts-Dunton was not slow to discover, were the moments spent in his

* Mr. S. C. Cockerell had charge of the business portion of the Kelmscott Printing House.

workroom, with its windows looking out upon his beloved Thames, with Hammersmith Bridge hard by. He who crossed the threshold of Kelmscott House felt the magic sense come upon him of being transplanted from the turmoil of a modern London suburb into the cloistered seclusion of mediævalism. In regard to the socialistic side of William Morris's busy life, Watts-Dunton took little or no interest, making no attempt to hide his opinion that every hour his friend gave to Socialism was an hour lost. "He had the talent for success, the genius for making things go, that rarely deserted him through life—never, at least, one might say," Watts-Dunton would declare, "except when the spirit of adventure and poetry led him to play the Socialist." Watts-Dunton's phrase, "play the Socialist," does scant justice to the thoroughness and whole-heartedness which Morris threw into his social propaganda. Watts-Dunton went more often, indeed, to Hammersmith for a quiet afternoon with Mrs. Morris and her daughters on those Sundays upon which Morris was out on a "grand field day with the Socialists," as Mrs. Morris expressed it.

"Many are of opinion," wrote Watts-Dunton, who was ever an enthusiastic admirer of Morris's verse, "that *The Lovers of Gudrun* is his finest poem: he worked at it from four in the morning until four in the afternoon, and when he rose from the table he had produced seven-hundred-and-fifty lines! Think of the forces at work in producing a poem like *Sigurd*; think

of the mingling of the drudgery of the Dryasdust with the movements of an imaginative vision unsurpassed in our time; think, I say, of the collaborating of the *Volsunga Saga* with the *Nibelungenlied*, the choosing of this point from the sagaman, and of that from the later poem of the Germans, and then fusing the whole by imaginative heat into the greatest epic of the nineteenth century." At the moment when Watts-Dunton reviewed *The Story of Sigurd*,* Mr. Edmund Gosse wrote to him (December 5, 1876) with that irresistible enthusiasm felt by many at the time the poem was published: "It seems to me without question one of the noblest and best sustained poems in the language, and altogether beyond adequate praise." In the opinion of Watts-Dunton this marvellous gift of energy in Morris's nature accounted for the immense productivity in different fields of action. "Whatever chanced to be his goal at the moment was pursued by him with as much intensity as though the universe contained no other possible goal, and then, when the moment was passed, another goal received all his attention."

There is no doubt that Morris's virile personality lent its aid to a large extent in making effective the tenets of Pre-Raphaelitism. Where would the enterprise known as "Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Company" have been but for his commercial ability, energy, and daring? "To him is due." as Watts-Dunton was one of the first to recognize, "the great revival in

* Vide *Athenæum*, Vol. II., 1876.

decorative art for which the mid-Victorian period will always be famous."

William Morris greatly appreciated Watts-Dunton's interest in his books.*

When Morris read in the *Athenæum* the notice of *The Wood Beyond the World*, he said to Watts-Dunton: "I am so often praised for achieving what I never aimed at that it is quite refreshing to be criticized by a man like yourself who understands one's aim. I fully recognize how important it is that the curse of rhetoric should be clearly stated. It is so little understood! Most people have no inkling of it. I sometimes think that many people—intelligent people, too—see nothing but rhetoric in measured language."

Two months before Morris died Watts-Dunton wrote to one of the poet's oldest friends, F. S. Ellis, from The Pines (July 22, 1896):—

"By a vexing accident I mislaid your letter which was sent on to me at Barking Hall, Suffolk, where I have left Swinburne, and I had no means of recovering your address save by calling at Morris's house in Hammersmith. Hence the delay in replying to it.

"Swinburne was much gratified to get such kind words of appreciation from you. One remark of yours upon the new and original metaphor about the dawn was so true that I could not refrain from making use of it in Swinburne's honour.

* For a list of Watts-Dunton's articles on William Morris's *Works* in the *Athenæum*, *vide* Appendix.

"I am deeply disturbed about Morris, who, as you of course know, starts to-day for Norway. To confront the idea that he may not recover from his illness is more than I can manage. To lose him would really be to lose a large slice out of one's own life. We must continue to hope courageously and doggedly.

"Swinburne I left with his mother, keeping her birthday (her eighty-seventh) at Lord Ashburnham's Suffolk place; but when he returns I hope we shall have the great pleasure of seeing you to lunch here, or dinner. Let me know when you are next in London."

Ellis replies (July 25, 1896) :—

"It was a very great pleasure to me to have a letter from you, and one I had scarcely reckoned on.

"While earnestly hoping for the best, one cannot but be very anxious about Morris. I went to see him at Kelmscott in May, and at Folkestone at the end of June, and can but consider his condition to be very serious, especially from the apparent inability of the doctors to diagnose his illness.

"That we should lose him is the anticipation of a disaster past words. To me he is all, if possible more, than Rossetti was to you—yes, more—for thirty years are more than ten, and what I owe to Morris I cannot say.

"'Twould have been a blank, dreary world to look back upon without him and the others of his circle.

"*Balen* is truly a glorious book; * I have read it and

* See Watts-Dunton's review of *Balen* (*Athenæum*, Vol. I., 1896).

am reading it again and again; its strength, diction, and freshness of imagery are quite wonderful. It is good of you to propose that I should come and lunch with you and Swinburne. It would be a pleasure indeed, but my visits to London are rare. I hope to go and see Morris on his return, but my wife is much of an invalid, and I cannot get away for long. My kind regards to Swinburne."

Watts-Dunton wrote *Athenæum* reviews of two posthumous works of William Morris: *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* and *The Well at the World's End*. When his critique in the *Athenæum* upon the first of these two books appeared,* F. S. Ellis, who now found himself one of Morris's literary executors, wrote a letter to Watts-Dunton, showing his keen pleasure in the work of the author of *The Earthly Paradise*. It is dated Torquay, December 7, 1897 :—

"My dear Watts-Dunton,

"Although, as you remark, Morris was regardless of criticism, he was by no means regardless of intelligent and masterly appreciation such as is contained in your splendidly written article in the *Athenæum* of last Saturday, and that he should not have lived to see it adds another deep regret to the many that we feel at his loss. I feel sure that he would have felt gratified and exalted by it. Pardon me for at once assuming the notice to be yours, but I feel sure that you alone of people living could have written it.

* Vide *Athenæum*, Vol. II., 1897.

"I cannot help regretting, however, that he did not put the last poem into metre, and make that which is now in the press into a ballad, for that seems to me the proper form of each. Perhaps you are not aware that he actually wrote some portion of *The Wondrous Isles* in verse. I lament extremely that he did not persevere with his first intention.

"I delayed writing to thank you for your article till I had had time to read it carefully a second time.

"I trust you will pardon me if I say that I do not quite agree with your pessimism as regards the Epic. Though all is quite true that you say about the non-acceptance of the greatest Epic ever written if published now, there remains the great fact that *Sigurd* was written, lives, and will live, growing greater from day to day; so if another poet has the inspiration, a new epic will be written, and the few will glory in it while the many remain ignorant. Is it not the fact that many—nay, most of the greatest poetry was coldly received by the generation among whom it was born? How many people have even heard of *Balen*, with all its splendour of diction and magnificence of thought and imagination? Great poets write from inspiration, while the little novelists write for pay. One will last, the other die like flies.

"I am enjoying your poems much; many of them strike an entirely new note.

"Yours faithfully,

"F. S. Ellis."

After Morris's death Watts-Dunton was urged by many an editor to pen an appreciation of this wide-famed poet whom he had known so well for four-and-twenty years. But not even his friend Professor Prothero could get Watts-Dunton to write upon William Morris.

"I wish very much that your other engagements *had* permitted you to write about Morris in the *Quarterly Review*," the editor wrote to him (October 29, 1899); "but creative work such as you are doing is, after all, the better for oneself, and more valuable than almost any criticism."

V.

THE "EXAMINER," AND LIFE AT DANES INN.

V.

The "Examiner," and Life at Danes Inn (1872–76).

WITHIN a few weeks of his earliest visit to Rossetti at Kelmscott Manor, an important meeting took place between Watts-Dunton and Algernon Charles Swinburne, though not the first. In a letter dated October 1, 1872, Madox Brown writes :—

"I have just returned from the north, and should be glad to meet you again after this rather long interval. The poet Swinburne is here at this moment, and was speaking to me about his publisher, Hotten. I told him I should much wish that I might have your advice in a rather puzzling matter with him. Could you do us the pleasure to meet him at dinner here Thursday, at 7 o'clock ?"

On that memorable evening at Madox Brown's dinner party at Fitzroy Square, Watts-Dunton and Swinburne talked eloquently on many matters in certain fields of literature in which they had both taken a special interest from boyhood. This was especially

the case of Elizabethan letters. They were at this time both middle-aged men, Swinburne being only some four years younger than Watts-Dunton. "Your minor, my dear sir," as Swinburne was often in the habit of saying when playfully addressing his friend.

At the very time of this meeting at Madox Brown's, Watts-Dunton was on the eve of taking up his residence at 15 Great James Street, near Holborn, within a few doors of Swinburne's chambers, which were at No. 3.* Being such close and congenial neighbours, and finding themselves so thoroughly *en rapport*, hardly a day now went by without their meeting at each other's rooms. They dined together frequently, their favourite restaurant being "The London," at the Chancery Lane corner of Fleet Street, well known in those days. Neither of them were "club men"—in fact, Watts-Dunton was never at any time of his life a member of any London club, with the exception of the "Omar Khayyám." He had a distinct aversion to clubs and club life generally.

Having settled down in Great James Street, Watts-Dunton at once took up literature seriously, though daily attending at the office in Bedford Row on legal business. He had written the opening chapters of *Aylwin*, as already related, and he now devoted the early hours of each day to the writing of the continuation of this

* Watts-Dunton's reason for having chosen chambers in Great James Street was ~~owing to~~ the fact that his father's London agents occupied offices in the next street, Bedford Row. It was, therefore, by a lucky accident—not by design—that he and Swinburne became near neighbours.

novel. It was his intention to place the complete manuscript of the work in the hands of Messrs. Hurst and Blackett—introduced to him by F. W. Robinson—in time for the autumn season of 1873. It did not appear that autumn; other literary and legal work of more immediate importance from a pecuniary standpoint interposed, and five-and-twenty autumns—five-and-twenty of the busiest years of his life—went by before the novel saw the light!

The first interruption to the writing of this work of fiction occurred before many weeks at Great James Street had gone by. It came with an urgent request from a friend whose acquaintance he had made at Gordon Hake's house, and who was impressed with the originality of some remarks which fell from Watts-Dunton in a talk about Hamlet. This friend, the editor of the *New Monthly*, had heard Watts-Dunton descanting learnedly in reference to a volume, just published, on the *Hamlet* of Saxo Grammaticus, by his ethnological friend, Dr. R. G. Latham, and he managed to persuade Watts-Dunton to write a review of the book in his magazine. This review, which was called *The Lost Hamlet*, appeared in the *New Monthly* in April 1873. It was the first article of any importance ever published by Watts-Dunton. In literary circles it attracted wide attention at the time, and was pronounced by Swinburne, among others, to be the best piece of literary research and criticism ever published in reference to this much-criticized Shakespearean masterpiece. This

essay was occasionally drawn upon by Watts-Dunton in subsequent work, especially in his article on *Hamlet* in *Harper's Magazine*.

At this Great James Street period Swinburne was busily occupied in writing *Bothwell*. He frequently read scenes from this play to Watts-Dunton and other friends before it was in proof; indeed, nothing ever delighted him more than to read aloud, especially if the reading happened to be pages from his own poems. A gathering of admirers at Swinburne's rooms with the special object of hearing him read his manuscript was no uncommon occurrence.

But the bond of sympathy between these two poets was not confined to literature. Watts-Dunton's invaluable services as a man of business were from the first fully recognized by Swinburne. As the affair of the forged cheque was, "through Watts's friendly offices," so satisfactorily arranged for Rossetti, so was the matter of Swinburne's "Hotten affair" also arranged (broached in the first instance in Madox Brown's letter), and through the same "friendly offices." The correspondence between Swinburne and Watts-Dunton "*re* Hotten" proved voluminous, which goes to show that Swinburne was by no means too deeply absorbed in *Bothwell*, in *The Three Stages of Shakespeare*, or even in *Mary Stuart*, which were occupying his attention during the time of these negotiations, to direct an occasional eye to the main chance.

Within a few days of the eventful little dinner at

Madox Brown's, the "Hotten affair" was taken in hand.

J. C. Hotten's business relations with Swinburne had begun in 1866, and the poet's great desire at the time of his meeting with Watts-Dunton was to sever his connection with this publisher, against whom he had a host of grievances.

At the beginning of 1874 Swinburne was still undecided as to a publisher for *Bothwell*, although the work was almost complete.

"I should naturally wish *Bothwell* to be published by Chapman if we agree as to terms," he wrote to Watts-Dunton from Holmwood in March 1874. "John Morley has offered me his services in arranging the matter, and says, like yourself, 'Don't let it go too cheap!' to which I reply with Captain Cuttle, 'Yes, verily, and, please God, so I won't;' but I have about as much idea as that mariner might have what I ought to get for it.

"Alas! here is my birthday coming on me in a week, and three months since I was in hopes to have it ready by this birthday, and there are as yet twenty scenes at least to write. But it is the sort of work that gets itself done at a spurt, and there is no use trying to *force* a spurt. I want to begin getting it into type as soon as I can. I am not very much inclined to take the bloom off any part of the work by pre-publishing any of the songs (two English and one French) here or in America; and I have by me several lyrics not belong-

ing to *Bothwell* which I should be ready to publish either in English or American quarters. I've sent you some to look at.

"You may have seen that I am issuing in the *Examiner* a series of sonnets which were once to have appeared in the *Songs before Sunrise*, but are better separate."

In one of the first letters to Watts-Dunton on the matter of changing his publisher, Swinburne says in a letter from Holmwood :—

"I write at once on receiving your letter of yesterday, to say that I shall be much obliged if you will speak to Mr. Ellis.* When I first dealt with him he expressed himself ready and desirous to purchase from Hotten the books of mine in his hands, being doubtful only with regard to the work on Blake. I presume, therefore, that he will be willing to agree to your proposal now. . . . I have no desire to have any legal or other dispute with Hotten ; I wish simply to part with him on amicable terms, unless it is your opinion that I cannot do better than remain in his hands."

The prospect of Ellis superseding Hotten as Swinburne's publisher, however, fell through. Meanwhile there came a letter from Swinburne to Watts-Dunton complaining of Hotten's treatment of him in connection with his critical essay on *George Chapman*. Hotten

* Messrs. Ellis and White, D. G. Rossetti's publishers.

had consented to undertake a republication of Chapman's *Plays and Poems*, which "I thought," Swinburne writes, "and told him I thought, ought most certainly to be undertaken (it being a discredit to our literature that an age which had seen so many less worthy Elizabethan reprints should leave still unedited and uncollected the works of so eminent a poet), if I would write him an introductory essay on the genius of the author. This, for love of the subject and regard for an old favourite, I readily promised to do. I also supplied Hotten with several very rare early editions of plays and poems by Chapman—books of great value, of which he certainly could not have expected to obtain the loan elsewhere. Since then I have heard once or twice from H. to the effect that he was progressing with the editorial part of the work—collation, transcription, etc.—but have never seen a line of it, nor received any definite news whatever. On seeing the book announced in his list as 'edited' by me, I wrote at once to desire that the advertisement should be forthwith cancelled and the error corrected, as I could have nothing whatever to do with the editorial part of the business, revision of text, biographical notice, or anything else except the critical essay I had engaged to contribute by way of preface.

"For years I have heard nothing of the matter, though my books are still in Hotten's hands. And now, in default of his long-promised edition (of which he seems to have resigned the project altogether), Mr.

Pearson of Covent Garden has another ready for the press, and has applied to me through a friend to know if I will contribute a critical preface to his edition, on my own terms. . . . Now, I should like to lend a hand to the good work of first introducing Chapman as an original poet to his countrymen in a collected form; it would be, in fact, a disappointment to me to be deprived of a share in the business. To write direct to Hotten on the matter I know would, of course, be the worst thing possible to do, as I want an immediate and final answer which I may at once transmit to the opposite party. Of course, if H. intends to risk a counter-edition, I am bound to him by promise; but if not, surely I must be free to say my say about Chapman elsewhere."

In a postscript Swinburne adds: "Of all my friends in London, I know none of better counsel in my affairs than Madox Brown; two of the very few 'literary men' whom I call friends, Joseph Knight and Purnell, are also friends of his; if you think it would be of service to discuss the matters in hand with either (*re* Hotten), I will write to them on the subject, being confident of their goodwill to be of use to me."

Watts-Dunton now offered to take all correspondence with Hotten off Swinburne's hands, and letters began to pass between Watts-Dunton and the publisher. In December 1872, Hotten writes:—

"Agreeably to my promise, I post you the account

of sales of Mr. Swinburne's works. There are a few items in Mr. Swinburne's private account to be deducted. . . . Directly Christmas is over I will write to you at length with respect to Mr. Swinburne's books."

Within six months of writing this letter—in June 1873—Swinburne's publisher, Hotten, was dead. Before his death, however, Watts-Dunton had settled affairs connected with Hotten's firm to his friend's satisfaction. It now became a question as to what publisher should be selected in J. C. Hotten's place.

Andrew Chatto, of whom Watts-Dunton entertained a high opinion as a man of integrity and aptitude in matters of business, had occupied for some years a responsible position with Hotten. As it seemed evident that Chatto would take over Hotten's business, Watts-Dunton strongly advised Swinburne to consider the proposal that now came from Andrew Chatto not to transfer his patronage to another house. In reference to this matter, Chatto, in July 1873—about a month after J. C. Hotten's death—wrote to Watts-Dunton :—

"From the conversation that I had with you I thought it was not unlikely that Mr. Swinburne would abandon his proposed negotiation with Chapman and Hall, and renew friendly relations with myself, should I become, as I expect, the successor to Mr. Hotten's business.

"I very much desire to have the publication of *Bothwell*, which was promised to Mr. Hotten, and which he had announced and advertised for many years. It

was also explained that there were many difficulties in the way of a transfer of Mr. Swinburne's books to any other house, and that it was desirable for all parties they should be continued with myself. It was my impression that I was soon to see or hear from you on this subject; I did not understand that you were expecting me to send you any further information.

"Mrs. Hotten has had letters of administration granted to her of the effects of her late husband, and I am now managing the business on her behalf until other arrangements shall be entered into."

And so it came about that Chatto, succeeding to J. C. Hotten's business as Chatto and Windus, became the publishers of A. C. Swinburne's works.

Thus the matter of the long-projected essay on George Chapman was settled at last. In a letter, dated July 18, 1874, from The Orchard (Isle of Wight), Swinburne writes to Watts-Dunton: "You may tell Chatto I am carefully studying Chapman, with a view to the critical essay that I wish to make as full and complete on all sides as I can, and hope to do so before long." And he goes on to say, still writing from the Isle of Wight on 24th August in the same year: "I am very busy just now with the voluminous works of Chapman, but my essay is far advanced, and will, I hope, be a thorough piece of fair and exhaustive criticism." *

* For this essay on George Chapman, by A. C. Swinburne, see Chapman's *Works*, published by Messrs. Chatto and Windus.

After residing a year at Great James Street, incessantly engaged in the pursuit of literature and law, Watts-Dunton removed to Danes Inn, a secluded nook behind iron gates, where the roar of the traffic in the Strand was agreeably muffled all day long, and where at night could be heard the famous chimes from the church tower of St. Clement Danes close by.

When Watts-Dunton left Great James Street, Swinburne wrote to him from Holmwood; it was on December 4, 1873: "I am selfishly sorry to hear of your removal, as I lose you for a next-door neighbour in town, which was always pleasant to think of. Even if your letter had not arrived this morning I should have written to-day to let you know that I have just seen Chatto and Windus's December catalogue of books, in which a page (page 40) is filled by the advertisements of my books, and, among them, of '*Bothwell*, a new poem; in preparation.' . . . I did think of coming up this month to town, but if I can I should like to make an end of *Bothwell* first."

It was shortly after settling in these new chambers that Watts-Dunton made the acquaintance of Professor Minto, the editor of the *Examiner*, who also resided in the old Inn. Minto, of course, had read *The Lost Hamlet*, and was now eager to induce Watts-Dunton to join the *Examiner* staff. Watts-Dunton consented.

He found himself in good company, for, under Professor Minto's able editorship, Swinburne, William Black, Dr. Garnett, W. Bell Scott, and many other noted

men revived for a time by their brilliant contributions the traditions of the journal.

One of Watts-Dunton's earliest contributions was a review of Mr. Edmund Gosse's tragedy, *King Erik*.* The article is well worthy of note, if only as showing the enthusiasm and well-balanced judgment of the critic from the moment of making his own *début* in journalism. For these attributes remained to him until the end of his days. In speaking in this *Examiner* review of the development of the character of the heroine Botilda, in *King Erik*, Watts-Dunton says :—

"Not often has the dramatist such an opportunity as this play affords, and if he had he would rarely have the required endowments to make good use of it, especially if the character to be developed is a woman's. For what are called women in dramas are often very sorry women indeed, depending for their feminine traits greatly upon their petticoats. Shakespeare's are an exception, of course. But even his women—compare them with the men !

'Most women have no characters at all,'

says Pope. And that is true. No characters they have, when seen from the point of view of the satirist or the

* This poetic drama was first published by Chatto and Windus in 1876. There was another edition of the work brought out in 1893, with an introductory essay by "Theodore Watts," being a reproduction of the critique on *King Erik* in the *Examiner* (February 5, 1876).

roué. But from another point of view—that of Charlotte Brontë, say, or George Eliot—they seem to have characters—something, at least, that might without offence to our own sex be called characters. The character of Botilda is, for a man's woman, a great and most remarkable success. . . . It is a long time since anything so tender, so pathetic, and so true has been given to us in dramatic poetry. . . . It is a beautiful story, beautifully told. And let it be remembered that there is nothing so difficult as to write a 'jealousy-play.' If the hero's jealousy is justifiable, then the heroine, being guilty, loses our sympathies; if unjustifiable, then the hero must be duped by the machinations of the villain, or by his being entangled in an extraordinary web of maleficent circumstances. But these machinations or these circumstances must be so transparent to the audience that there be no question as to the heroine's innocence, upon whom devolves most of the pathetic business. But then, again, if these machinations or circumstances are so transparent as this, the simplicity of the hero's character must be so unusual as to border on actual fatuity, as it does in the Spanish comedies, and as it very nearly does with regard to Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and to Don Felix in the *Wonder*. Othello is only saved (and barely saved now and then) from losing our sympathies by his fatuity, from his exactly answering our ideas of that frank, almost childlike, simple-mindedness which we imagine to be the characteristic of the British soldier-hero (though very unlike

the Italian notion of a soldier in Cinthio's time). But then Othello has taken this place once and for ever; while Iago has equally monopolized the place of the designing villain. Consequently, the villain has had to change sex since Shakespeare's time, and becomes the mother-in-law, as in M. Dennery's *L'Aïeule*, and in several of the comedies of Sardou and others, or the jealous mother or designing waiting-woman, as in the present play. To give us, therefore, a jealous hero who is not at all a fool and yet not at all Othello, induced by machinations to suspect a heroine who is nevertheless worthy of our sympathies, being innocent, is a thing that is worth doing; and this Mr. Gosse, we think, has done."

Another essay in the *Examiner* which attracted considerable attention, and which Watts-Dunton himself regarded as the best he ever wrote for the "Minto journal," was the one on George Sand. In fact, the editor of the *Athenæum* now began to pay frequent visits to Danes Inn, approaching Watts-Dunton in the quiet, tactful way so characteristic of the man, with the hope of getting some of these "literary plums" for the "MacColl journal," of which the "Minto journal" was enjoying an enviable monopoly.

The critique that Watts-Dunton wrote on Thackeray in the *Examiner* brought him many appreciative letters. Thackeray, indeed, was one of the few novelists to whose work Watts-Dunton gave some attention in the

studious days at St. Ives. In a letter to the editor of the *Cambridge Chronicle*, written at that time, defending the author of *Vanity Fair* from an accusation of cynicism, he says :—

"SIR,

"I am sorry to find your London correspondent—whose lucubrations are generally as fair in spirit as they are interesting—re-echoing the silly outcry about what is called the 'cynicism' of Mr. Thackeray; and I am struck with the extreme *bizarrerie* of his strictures when I call to mind that it was the same severe censor who, a week or two since, styled that great master of English prose 'an improvement upon Fielding.' Surely, any comparison of Mr. Thackeray (whose heart is, I believe, as sympathetic as that of any man under heaven) with the misanthrope, Timon, is singularly infelicitous; as every candid reader of his works must admit that, if he be one of the Doctor's 'good haters,' his hatred is at least confined to what is admittedly base and mean and 'snobbish' in society; while, for all that is noble, simple, and ingenuous, he has the fullest, the heartiest sympathy. If his idiosyncrasy persists in depicting the *Wahrheit* instead of the *Dichtung* of life, what right have we to blame him for that? Have we not our sentimental Dickenses, Bulwers, Disraelis, etc., to give us enough and to spare of the latter article? Mr. Thackeray chooses to make his own exploring expeditions into the mysterious laby-

rinth of human motives, and his report always offends us. Why? Because it happens to be about as flattering as Horace Walpole's of one of his lady friends, who, he said, 'had as fine a set of teeth as any woman could have who had but one, and that *black*.' But he tells us what he sees, not what he would *like* to see; and indignant ladies and gentlemen (especially ladies) are 'disgusted with his cynicism.' Mr. Thackeray's lectures on the 'Four Georges' I am unable to speak of, not having as yet had the pleasure of hearing them; but if he has been able to say much in praise of those radiant monarchs, he has done what few—very few—other men could do, and deserves the gratitude of every Englishman who has the honour of his country at heart. As for the Lecturer's 'pandering for applause to the humblest who can pay to hear him,' the accusation is simply meaningless when applied to Mr. Thackeray, who, to say nothing of his undoubted genius, is a 'scholar and a gentleman,' and can be influenced by no such motives."

After settling down in the new quarters, the Wednesday nights were instituted at Danes Inn, and soon became known. The sitting-room in those chambers was exceptionally large and lofty, and well suited for entertaining a goodly number of friends. Among the guests one frequently met William Morris, though at that time a busy worker at his place at 26 Queen's Square, in Bloomsbury, whilst Swinburne was there



not only at every Wednesday gathering when in town, but looked in daily to secure Watts-Dunton's company at dinner, as before, on his way to "The London," near at hand. In addition to Swinburne, there were to be seen at these symposia, Madox Brown, Churton Collins, Thomas Purnell, Professor Minto, Westland Marston. And then Minto used to gather about him his *Examiner* staff on Monday nights, in a room over the publisher's office in the Strand. It was at one of these gatherings that Watts-Dunton first met William Black, the most popular novelist of that period—even more popular, perhaps, than Justin M'Carthy, who, at this time an important man on the *Daily News*, had just published his story *Dear Lady Disdain* (1875), which was so much talked about.

Black was a frequent contributor to the *Examiner*. It was in the columns of Minto's journal that one of his least successful novels, *Green Pastures in Piccadilly*, appeared in serial form. A native of Glasgow, the most notable feature of William Black's work was his knowledge and intense admiration of the Highlands of Scotland. He knew Carlyle well, and in the course of a talk with him one day, the "Sage of Chelsea" observed, "Ay, ay, ye ken eno' Scotland well, but tell me, mon, when are ye gaun to do some wark?"

In society Black was a silent, reserved man, but at home this trait in his character vanished completely: he was the most entertaining of hosts. The story was often related by Watts-Dunton, of how an American author,

in proposing Black's health at some literary dinner, referred to him as "the greatest of living novelists," and called upon the company to drink to their guest, "the author of *Lorna Doone*." This caps the story of Queen Victoria expressing her appreciation of Mrs. Browning as the author of *Aurora Floyd!*

Another highly entertaining man at the Danes Inn gatherings was Thomas Purnell, the once famous "Q" of the *Athenæum*, one of the leading theatrical critics of the day. It was he who invented the phrase "cup and saucer comedy" in connection with Tom Robertson's plays. His dramatic criticism frequently made Charles Reade, and even Tom Taylor, wince.

Purnell was one of the most interesting and genial of bohemians in the genuine upper bohemian period. Where he lived no one, even among the Fleet Street fraternity, ever knew or cared to inquire. That he resided with a sister in the neighbourhood of Lambeth was a surmise which nobody took the trouble to verify. He was a familiar figure at first nights in the seventies, and a haunter of those midnight clubs where dramatic critics were wont to congregate. But he was never what is called a "loafer;" and though suffering from chronic impecuniosity, he was always well dressed, with a good figure, a little above the middle height, and a remarkably handsome face. He had silvery white hair, worn long, which contrasted with his black eyebrows, brilliant, dark, juvenile-looking eyes, and dark complexion. His great regard for Watts-Dunton's

uncle, J. Orlando Watts, whom he always spoke of as "the scholar," was a source of great pleasure to the nephew, for, as mentioned in the "Key to the Characters in *Aylwin*," almost the only person outside his own family who managed to break through the icy wall that surrounded that recluse was this brilliant but eccentric journalist. J. O. Watts, as his nephew often related, never made new friends, and when one after the other of his few old friends died, he was left so entirely alone that he saw no one except his relations on Putney Hill. He was a frequent visitor at Danes Inn, his office being on the opposite side of the Strand, but he never could be induced to attend the gatherings.

Thomas Purnell would frequently join Watts-Dunton and Swinburne at "The London," for he and the author of *Atalanta* were close friends, their greatest source of *rapprochement* being Charles Lamb: no two men ever worshipped "Elia" more wholeheartedly. It was at Purnell's suggestion, while Watts-Dunton was still living at Danes Inn, that the 10th of February 1875, being the centenary of the birth of Charles Lamb, should be commemorated in a dinner at "The London." Swinburne, who was in the country at the time, was at once written to and hastened up to town, for it was only on the eve of the auspicious day that the idea of this tribute to Lamb's memory was thought of. The dinner took place: Swinburne, Watts-Dunton, Thomas Purnell, and one or two other Lambites were present. It was a very scanty assembly,

in fact, and the banquet was certainly not a success. There were no speeches, but the joking about Charles Lamb led to such extravagant remarks on the part of Purnell that Swinburne grew bored and irritable, and over the "wine and walnuts" the "Centenary Dinner" was wisely brought to a sudden termination.

During Watts-Dunton's residence at Danes Inn, Swinburne was frequently at Holmwood, where his parents lived. From this place at Henley-on-Thames the poet wrote long letters to his friend. At the time Swinburne's volume, *Essays and Studies*, was being projected (his first volume of general literary criticism)—a collection of seven years' work. He wrote, June 20, 1874 :—

"I am simply astonished—excuse my saying so—at your suggestion that a volume of Studies should omit all articles on contemporary poets. What on earth would it contain, after omitting by far the most important, and, if there be any value in any, by far the most valuable of my essays—those on Hugo, Arnold, and Rossetti—three writers who have scarcely a quality, good or bad, in common, and can hardly be supposed the idols of the same coterie or representatives of the same school! These, *of course*, would be the chief studies in the volume; as they are undoubtedly the last, and those which have attracted most attention among my prose writings. The points on which I am undecided are those only on which I asked your advice in my last letter. —Yours most sincerely, A. C. SWINBURNE."

Although more than one dramatist approached Swinburne concerning the "staging" of *Bothwell*, it proved hopeless, even when Irving during the height of his popularity gave the question serious consideration.

"These many days I have meant to write, but other business and pleasure have been filling up my scarce holidays. . . . As to Mr. Oxenford's half share in the profits of the acted play, *Bothwell*, and acting edition," Swinburne writes, "if his proposal seems to you reasonable, I cannot but be content to close with it. Either of his plans for adaptation would be equally acceptable to me. The division into tableaux instead of acts is one which had occurred to me as the best, if not the only, way of re-forming it for the stage, and would, I should think, in any case be the most satisfactory method by far of representation. How far the general arrangement of the play might be otherwise readjusted than by this breaking up of the acts would, if necessary, be a matter for further consideration. I should not dream of objecting to any suppression or of consenting to any interpolations."

A year later, at the moment of the publication of *Essays and Studies*, he was in correspondence with his friend on the subject of his *Three Stages of Shakespeare*, upon which he was now busily occupied (July 1875).

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"Though my two last letters have obtained no answer, I am obliged to trouble you again about my

Essay on Shakespeare, of which I hope a new instalment will before long be ready. I want to know how we are to arrange about the simultaneous issue in America as proposed by the editor of the *N.Y. Independent*. Have you taken any steps in consequence of his letter to me which I put into your hands on receiving it, or decided in what way and when we are to communicate with him, or how to obtain and forward in due time the advance sheets for which he stipulated? Till I hear from you in answer to these questions I cannot, of course, write to Morley about my next appearance in the *Fortnightly*, or even let him know when he may expect a resumption of the subject on my part; which is, of course, an inconvenience to me in the way of future arrangements. I am going to do some more Elizabethans for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Beaumont and Fletcher are sent off to press, and I look forward with real pleasure to a good grapple with Ben Jonson."

While staying with his friend Jowett, the *Three Stages of Shakespeare* was still giving him concern. The volume was published in 1880.

"ASHFIELD HOUSE, WEST MALVERN,
"*August* 13, 1875.

"I was very glad to get your letter yesterday, and find you were in the land of the living. I write now only to ask you to direct to me here next time, if you have not already written again to Holmwood, as I am staying for a few weeks here with Jowett. I am no

longer a helpless cripple; indeed, my foot is nearly well; but it has been a very long business.* I am anxious to hear from you about the American matter, as a second instalment of my Shakespeare essay is now nearly ready, and I want Morley to have it as soon as possible without injury to my own (transatlantic) interests."

A story that illustrates Swinburne's attitude towards women, Watts-Dunton would tell to a few intimates.

On one occasion Watts-Dunton had asked some Irish girls to tea at his rooms at Danes Inn. They were highly gifted girls, and beautiful besides. In the midst of the tea-party Swinburne suddenly marched in. Watts-Dunton introduced him, and Swinburne joined in the conversation with much animation, chatting with them as easily as if he had known them half a lifetime.

As he was by no means accustomed to talk so freely, Watts-Dunton concluded that he had been favourably impressed. After a while the girls bade their host farewell. When they had gone Watts-Dunton looked inquiringly at Swinburne, expecting a panegyric. There came the Swinburnian toss of the head and the rhapsodical tones—"My dear sir . . . those girls that have been here are really"—he paused for a moment as he often did in the middle of a sentence, and Watts-Dunton waited in curiosity for the verdict—"they are

* This refers to a sprained ankle, an accident that happened through jumping from a fence while out for a walk at Holmwood.

really remarkably tall young women!" "And that is all," said Watts-Dunton, "he could ever be induced to say about them. He had liked them well enough; yet the one thing that impressed him particularly was their height. I can imagine Morris or Rossetti coming in," pursued Watts-Dunton, "as Swinburne had. Rossetti would have taken me aside at once, and apostrophized their beauty. . . . He was safe to have fallen in love with them, as he fell in love with every pretty girl he met. Morris, who rarely commented on physical appearance, and was curiously indifferent to pretty faces for one with the artistic temperament, would have spoken about their intelligence after they had gone. The girl who could talk brightly always won the favour of Morris."

Among the numerous interesting men Watts-Dunton met and invited to the Danes Inn "Wednesday nights" was Joaquin Miller, whose fame as the author of *Songs of the Sierras* made him a prominent figure for a season or two in literary circles in London. He had rooms in Museum Street of a very diminutive and dingy character. But he was never slow to invite friends there with the slightest pretension to literature. He would express his astonishment, wherever he went, at Watts-Dunton's profound knowledge of the art of poetry. "It's amazin'," he would exclaim. "He seems to know everything about poetry that was ever written, and much more. And here am I, a poet with a big name, and I'm darned if I could tell the difference between a hexameter and a pentameter, to save my scalp!"

Watts-Dunton often told the story of how the "shaggy-headed son of the Sierras" chanced to make Swinburne's acquaintance. When he came to England in 1871, his first thought on reaching London was to call upon the author of *Atalanta*, for he was crazed to know him. On presenting himself at the poet's chambers, however, and sending up his name, Swinburne curtly refused to see him. Joaquin was about to retire abashed, when a sudden inspiration flashed across his mind. "Tell Mr. Swinburne," said he, "that I'm the man who took part in the expeditionary force awhile ago against the Mexican Republic." By way of reply Swinburne himself appeared on the stairs, and welcomed the hero with outstretched hands. Cincinnatus Heine Miller—to drop the pseudonym—had found the sesame to Swinburne's heart.

Joseph Knight, one of the most welcome of guests at the Danes Inn gatherings, was too busy a dramatic critic to be among his friends there on all occasions. But the following letter shows how much he appreciated those evenings. "I have too pleasant memories of my last visit to Danes Inn not to seize the opportunity of revisiting it if I could," he wrote in a letter of October 17, 1875. "Unfortunately, there is a new play at The Mirror, and I am obliged to be there and to write afterwards, so that it is quite out of my power. Of course you have seen *Macbeth*. Remember me to Morris."

Sir Richard Burton, a lifelong friend of Watts-

Dunton and Swinburne, would also, when in London, come to the Danes Inn "Nights." He and Watts-Dunton were constant correspondents.

"A merry Xmas and happy New Year to you," he wrote from Trieste on Christmas Day, 1875. "Although why the wish should go at the winter solstice, *alias* Yule, rather than at any other time, I am puzzled to explain. We arrived here yesterday after a very pleasant trip of three weeks, delayed everywhere by friends who would not let us go. We shall start on January 15 for India; my chest wants a change, and the Red Sea will soon set me right. . . . Here the weather is beautiful, both clear and sunny. We only hope that it will last. My wife joins in kindest regards. What about Swinburne? I see his name in the *Ency. Brit.*"

Again, while in Paris (October 28, 1875), he writes :—

"My dear Watts,

"Thank you for all the trouble you have taken. Your reply to Chatto quite right. Had I not better see him with you after my return? Who is the Scientific party to whom you have committed the Etruscan affair? I have a few lines to insert in the MS., and should also like to see *him*.

"My work here is to see * * * the anthropologist, and a variety of other friends, to push my 'carbine-pistol' with the French Government, and to rub off the crust of inveterate *ennui* which erupted upon me at Vichy.

"Life in France is greyer and duller than in any part of the world except Switzerland. . . . I went to the Riviera, and never believed that the French Army had become so profoundly demoralized. The whole affair is utterly contemptible, though Prussia may grin at their attempts.

"*Enfin adieu* and *au revoir*. I shall leave Paris on or about November 1.

"Ever yours faithfully,

"R. F. BURTON."

How constantly Burton was "on his travels" may be seen from the fact that his letters to his friends were seldom addressed from the same country—Europe, Asia, Africa; no one ever knew from what part of the world his communications might come. In a letter from India—it is dated from Watson's Esplanade Hotel, Bombay, March 10, 1876—he says:—

"We have just returned from a fortnight's trip to Haiderabad (Deccan), and have enjoyed ourselves famously. You will probably see an account of it in the *Pall Mall*. I am here till the Prince leaves (13th), and then start for Scinde, depositing my wife at Bombay, as the journey would be too hot for her. After that I take her to the Nilgiri Hills, and send her back about April to Trieste.

"Many thanks for yours of the 16th. . . . Will you kindly offer MS. letter to Payn or to Sampson

Low, or—to any one you please? It need not be sent out for me to correct, as the learning displayed in it is not large. . . .

"My wife joins me in kindest regards and remembrances to you. As yet she has stood the climate remarkably well; but this is the finest season of the year. We have had to refuse lots of kind invitations for want of time. A man working up India during the last score of years has his hands utterly full and not a moment to spare. Thank goodness, the Etruscan book is finished and ready for coming out. I'm afraid that the unagile brain of the British public will owe me another grudge. Daunt promised to revise it (Iceland), but he has not done so yet."

Six months later came a letter from Trieste. It is dated August 17, 1876:—

"My dear Watts,

"Many thanks for yours of August 16, which shows me that you are better. . . .

"My wife thanks you heartily for your kind offer about the book, but there is really nothing more to be done. I should like soon to know Paul's answer about Iceland. The manuscript will now want corrections, in consequence of not having appeared last year.

"Don't believe a word you read about Serbia, except in *Daily News*. The English papers enraged me. All sympathized with Garibaldi and Mazzini and yet

pitch into the unfortunate Turkish Christians. I suppose it is mere ignorance, that our nation shows badly in this affair whilst Russia comes out right well. The murders have been caused simply by sending the fleet to Besika Bay without warning the Turks against what every one who knows the East would foresee.

"United kind regards, and ever yours,

"R. F. BURTON."

For about a year, while on the *Examiner*, in 1874, Watts-Dunton undertook to fill the place of one of the partners, who was absent through illness, in the large firm of solicitors, where his uncle, J. O. Watts, held an important position, as already mentioned. He was offered a partnership if he would consent to remain —a partnership which would have led to his occupying in a few years the position of head partner. On joining the *Athenæum* he resigned his post. For twenty-six years after this period, however, he was actively engaged in the legal profession.

It was during the December of his second year in London, while still on the staff of the *Examiner*, that Watts-Dunton went for a short trip to Italy, the only visit he ever made to that country. He joined Gordon Hake at Rome. In a letter dated from that city, December 14, 1874, Hake says :—

"I am delighted at hearing from you. Come to this hotel by all means; I shall expect you on Wednesday evening. The train leaves Florence at 8.15 or 30.

It is a most beautiful route ; you pass Lake Thrasymena and many lovely hillside towns. Do not travel at night, therefore. I expected you here last night, as my son, Thomas, said you would reach Rome on Saturday. Give me another line, and I will, if possible, get a double-bedded room between us. This is as moderate an hotel as any in Rome—the same price as Porta Rofra at Florence—8 francs a day."

Yet it was not Rome but Venice, above all places in Italy, that Watts-Dunton wanted to visit, and for a specific object. It was in order to study local colour for certain parts of *Aylwin*, since he had originally taken his heroine to Venice. But although all his graphic descriptions were, on his return to London, introduced into the pages of the novel, every reference to Venice was subsequently deleted, though not until the manuscript was in proof. As a matter of fact, his meeting with " Sinfi Lovell " years before, while crossing from Snowdon to Capel Curig—a meeting so graphically described in his essay *On the Poetic Interpretation of Nature*—chanced to flash back upon his memory, and forced him to substitute the homelier scenery of North Wales with its Fairy Glen and Swallow Falls.*

It was immediately after his return from Italy that he wrote to Swinburne about that Italian trip. The letter is dated from Danes Inn, January 23, 1875 :—

* For Watts-Dunton's article *On the Poetic Interpretation of Nature*, by J. C. Shairp, see *Athenæum*, Vol. II. (1877).

"MY DEAR SWINBURNE,

"I was out of London when your welcome letter arrived, or I should have acknowledged such a valued present as that of the MS. by return of post. I think it is now superfluous for me to tell you that nothing you could ever give me would be so much prized by me as one of your MSS.; and I even yet not infrequently lament that, having been so near getting the MS. of *Bothwell*, I missed it 'by a fluke,' as the quoit players say. But do not forget that *Tristram* is for me. And really, I think I would rather get this than even *Bothwell*, save that the first portions are in another handwriting.

"Spite of the weather, which was bad, I had a delightful time in Italy. I went out with a bundle of letters of introduction, and had no sooner reached Florence than I found myself embarrassed by a wealth of friends, some of them exceedingly intelligent and interesting. There is quite a band of advanced thinkers, I find, at Florence.

"From your friend, Lorimer Graham, I received (thanks to his great regard for you) an amount of generous attention which surprised me. He offered, as soon as he saw me, to put a horse at my disposal, and invited me to stay at his house; and, although I did not avail myself of either of these outbursts of good-nature, I called upon him several times and dined at his house occasionally, and came to like him very much. He sent all kinds of affectionate messages to you. Kirkup (another of your friends) I missed; he had left Florence

for Leghorn, whither I did not go. At Rome I met Gordon Hake, who had been waiting there for me for weeks. Thanks to his guidance I 'did' Rome (in the Cockney sense) thoroughly in a short time.

"Rich as is Rome in everything to enthral the imagination, the discord between the old world (fifteen feet beneath the present surface of the earth then) and the somewhat dirty and vulgar new world above ground, did, perhaps, shock me, after the perfect 'one-ness' of Florence, which is a city borne down to us perfect from the middle-ages. But after a while, I got reconciled to this, and then Rome grew upon me daily. Nothing that I have ever read of the Palace of the Cæsars or of the Coliseum had given me an adequate idea of the stupendous realities. I spent Christmas Day in Rome and New Year's Day in Venice. I forget whether you have been to Venice; if you have, we must compare notes, rapturously, when we meet; if not, so much the worse for me, for I should have much liked to know the impression this city of enchantment had upon a man like yourself. Surely there is nothing half so bewitching in the world. Nothing that Turner or Canaletto has done can give the poorest idea of the bewildering loveliness of Venice. And then this is a remarkable, but, I think, hitherto unnoticed thing: there are to be met in Venice three pretty, or handsome, women to one in any other Italian city. As to the riches of such a place as the Doge's Palace, no tongue and no pen could do justice to them, unless perhaps your own or Rossetti's.

"I am very pleased to hear that the political poems are to appear. With the exception of the sonnet called *The Saviour of Society* (which does, even to me, *seem* a painful insult to a name that every lover of moral beauty must hold sacred), the fire and vigour of those sonnets delight me, whose political feelings are not strong. If the *motif* of the sonnet I have alluded to *is* the contrast of the most beautiful with the most hateful of characters (for surely Christ was one and Louis Buonaparte was the other), it is a pity that this is not rendered more plain, not merely to my apprehension, but to that of one critic at least for whose insight you have the greatest respect.

"I will see Chatto again upon the various matters you allude to, and get them attended to. The type of the new edition of *Atalanta* does undoubtedly seem small, but I fear there is no help for it. I will tell Chatto to make the printer stick religiously to the present edition in its every detail.

"I have reread the article on Wells with great pleasure, and although I think that you may have a little over-praised the drama, I must say that I greatly admire the extracts you have given.* When two men like you and Rossetti see so much in it, the drama simply must be a wonderful one. I, for my part, feel it to be

* *Joseph and His Brethren*, by Charles Wells, World's Classics edition, with an Introduction by A. C. Swinburne, reprinted from his article in the *Fortnightly Review*, and a Preface by T. Watts-Dunton.

great till it is compared with the greatest. Then I begin to ask for a certain masterly concision in the great situations; I miss those sudden forks of flame which illuminate perpetually the lawless and tempestuous skies of the Elizabethan drama with which you have compared it. Amid all the eager *abandon* of passion—the foul-mouthed unpacking of the heart—which the drunken gods of the Elizabethan drama give you, there is every now and then a touch of subtlest reticence (passion at white heat is reticent, at red heat vituperative)—a line or hemistich of profound tragic suggestion that sets the imagination of the reader ablaze, and shews that, behind all this windy violence and turbulence of clouds, there is a god, with real lightning in his hands, who, if he is drunk, is drunk from excess of power, and reeling because his wings are stronger than his feet.

"Ever yours,

"W. T. WATTS."

In speaking of Italy in his "notes" for a Rossetti *Life*, Watts-Dunton remarks: "Strange as it may appear to most people, the poet-painter never went to Italy. This was not from any feeling of indifference, but from an extraordinary dislike of travelling. When in 1874, Dr. Gordon Hake and I made that sojourn in Italy, which my old friend records in his sonnet sequence, *The New Day*, we nearly persuaded Rossetti to make the journey in our company, but not quite. On our return home we fired him with enthusiasm about the

pictures we had seen, and he became eager to go. Unluckily, however, he refused to go without me, and circumstances had arisen which made it impossible for me to go. Years went on, and he never did go."

The interest and personal superintendence that Watts-Dunton took in Swinburne's output of poetic work, even in those Danes Inn days, is shown in the frequent correspondence that passed between them. Writing from his chambers in the Strand, in January 1876, he says :—

"Of the three poems you left with me I offered Maccoll the best, the nameless one, beginning,—

'In a coign of a cliff between lowland and highland,'

which he was very glad to take, as well he might be, for, on rereading it, it seems to me more beautiful than ever. But what name is it to have? Let me know this. *Erechtheus*, as I expected, is being received with enthusiasm. There is no doubt it is your greatest poem. No words can express to you how it still astonishes and delights me. Morris was in the other night with Maccoll and a few, and the verdict is unanimous that it stands at the top of the poetry of our time."

Again, in a subsequent letter, he says :—

"I have left myself but just time to say that I took the poem to Maccoll, who has accepted it at £20 for the *Athenæum*. I am to meet him in town about the other poems you left with me, one of which I shall offer him.

The proof, with the copy, of the one he has taken will be sent to you.

"Do not, pray, forget that I am to have the manuscript of *Erechtheus*. Where is it? The manuscript, too, of the present poem I understand you to have promised me. *N'est-ce pas?*"

Watts-Dunton's solicitude for the poet's peace of mind, moreover, was not confined to the transfer from Swinburne's shoulders to his own of all the uncongenial business details in the matter of J. C. Hotten. He even went so far as to conceal from his friend adverse criticisms of his works, when possible, during his studious sojourns at Holmwood with his family. And so it was in after years when they came to live together at The Pines: Watts-Dunton saved Swinburne from the knowledge of many a shaft and arrow aimed at him by the critics that might possibly chance to bring the poet back to earth in the midst of his flight of song. At the time when the critics were having their "flings" at *Erechtheus*, Swinburne wrote from Holmwood, on April 19, 1876:—

"I could no more have suspected a touch of Mrs. Candour in you than of Sir Fretful in myself; but knowing from the reports in the *Times* and the character of the 'biographies' current in the world, I thought it possible, after the experience I have had of abler than American 'interviewers,' that there might have been something which called for notice on my part,

or which you might think it best to give me a hint of; and in such a case I could not have acted on a hint, without further knowledge. It was the non-arrival of the paper after my reply to your offer of sending it which made me suspect that on second thoughts you might not quite like to forward it, out of a natural and friendly dislike to be the possible medium of communicating what might give me or be supposed to give me a moment's pain or irritation.

"I am truly relieved to know there is one article against *Erechtheus*; I was quite out of humour at reading no spice or vinegar to allay the general sugar and butter. I could not think well of a book any more than of a man of whom no one spoke ill. . . . I sent you last time but one I wrote, Mr. Grosart's splendiferous prospectus of his *Spenser* and *Daniel*, to which I had to refuse his request that I would contribute an essay on the genius of Spenser. (Did you get the prospectus?) I shall undertake no more prose till I have dropped the curtain on Fotheringay.* I have but just finished the first scene between the Maries—Stuart and Beaton—'after long years' in ward together—eighteen since Solway Firth. I never was better satisfied with anything I have written. I did well to indulge myself in *Erechtheus* first, as I feel all the fresher for this different and much harder work, where every step gives one ten times more things to consider, and every line implies (and requires) ten times more thought,

* *Mary Stuart*, published in 1881.

more weight and balance of reflection, than a score of such poems of simple 'elemental' emotion.

"Now I must return to Sir Amyas Paulet, which worthy Puritan has been kept waiting all this while, while I have been scribbling to you. I hope you liked the exposition of Juliet's Nurse and Mercutio." *

A year or two later Watts-Dunton, having given up his residence at Danes Inn, went, if not to live with his sister, Mrs. Charles Mason, at Putney, very frequently to stay there. In a letter to Swinburne, dated 3 Putney Hill, February 6, 1876 (opposite the site now occupied by The Pines), he says :—

"My dear Swinburne,

"I have been kept in the house so much during the last week by a severe cold, that I have not seen Maccoll since I last wrote. I expected to see the verses on W. M. Rossetti's little one this week in the *Athenæum*, but it does not appear. You are, of course, quite right in your assumption that *both* the poems mentioned by me are taken for the *Athenæum*, the price of the latter not having yet been fixed upon.

"Not till the other day did I read your article in last month's *Fortnightly*. I think it much better in every way than the previous one upon the same subject—much more critical, and in texture firmer as a piece of prose. I also have read your letter in the

* *The Three Stages of Shakespeare*, in *Fortnightly*, 1876.

Academy in answer to Furnivall. It is exceedingly good as a piece of writing, and as a discussion too. They tell me, however, that the man's first letter was couched in language too respectful, and was altogether too urbane in its temper to quite warrant the scornful tone of yours. If that is so, I shall be sorry. But I mean to get the number and read it.

"Is the poem you are now on of any length? And what are you doing?

"Yours ever,

"W. T. WATTS."

While still busily engaged in writing his tragedy, *Mary Stuart*, Swinburne addressed a letter to Watts-Dunton from Holmwood, dated August 30, 1879, at the moment when matters were being arranged for their settling down as housemates at The Pines.

"I am in great tribulation at having lost or mislaid my skeleton sketch of *Mary Stuart* (Pt. 3), without which I cannot get on at all, and with which I might (being now in working trim) have done two or three good days' work on it by this time. I must hunt for it in my London desk as soon as possible.*

"An hour or two before the arrival of your telegram I had determined to write (in any case), as my mother advised me, and ask your counsel as to the appearance of one more of those offensively absurd announcements

* Swinburne had rooms at this time in Guilford Street.

about my health which would seem to have become a stock-in-hand. She thinks with me (it is, indeed, her suggestion) that a contradiction from a third party would be at once more telling, graceful, and effective than a personal protest from myself to the effect that I was not at death's door, but as well as ever I was or could wish to be. I would on no account ask you to do me this little kindness if you would in the least prefer not to put your oar in ; but it is getting almost beyond a trivial matter to me, and there can be no doubt my mother is right in thinking I had better abstain from coming forward to swear to my own state of health, and very probably be disbelieved, whereas a disinterested personal witness might easily and finally put to silence, and so shame such futile and fulsome, if not pernicious, gossip, and that without the least even seeming compromise of dignity on his part or mine."



VI.

THE DINER-OUT.

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The Diner-out.

AMONG those brilliant receptions at the time Watts-Dunton was living at Danes Inn, Westland Marston's "Sunday nights" were, in his opinion, exceedingly attractive. For not only were the leading men and women in the literary and artistic world of London to be met there, but also the chief stars in the theatrical world. There was no attempt at formality. In an article in the *Athenæum* Watts-Dunton says: "Few *réunions* were more enjoyable, I think, than those Sunday evenings in the little house by Chalk Farm, where might be met occasionally Dante Rossetti, William Rossetti, Swinburne, William Morris, John Payne, Joaquin Miller, Dr. Gordon Hake, Henry Irving, Arthur O'Shaughnessy, Miss Glyn, Lady Duffus Hardy and Miss Hardy, Miss Neilson, Miss Ada Cavendish, and the two leading dramatic critics, Joseph Knight and Thomas Purnell most of all, besides others of the literary and dramatic world." * Sothern, who created "Lord

* Before Watts-Dunton's time, not only Rossetti in his younger days, but Thackeray and Dickens, had been frequent guests at Westland Marston's receptions.

Dundreary," was frequently there, for at this time Westland Marston wrote more than one comedy in which this famous actor of the mid-Victorian period took a leading part.

Again, in his *Reminiscences of the Blind Poet* (Philip Bourke Marston), which is among a number of Watts-Dunton's unpublished literary remains, he says of the Westland Marston nights at 9 Northumberland Terrace, Regent's Park Road :—

"The name of Westland Marston, the author of *The Patrician's Daughter*, *Strathmore*, *Philip of France*, and many another play, was a name of music to me, and for this reason. For me the English drama had been a subject of special study, and I deeply lament that severance between poetry and the acted drama which characterizes the stage of our time. Now, as far as I can see, the one man in England who was both a poet and successful playwright was Westland Marston, and never was I more delighted than when, on a certain summer evening, I went with my friend, Dr. Gordon Hake, to see him.* I could, if I would, tell how, when entering the room, I heard what at first appeared to me to be a banjo, but which turned out to be a Spanish guitar, and saw playing it what at first appeared to be a stout little old sailor, but who turned out to be an epic poet, dramatist, and

* Among his articles in the *Examiner*, Watts-Dunton wrote a critique on the Collected Edition of Westland Marston's plays. (Chatto and Windus, 1875.)

gold digger. I could tell how I heard the author of *Strathmore* talking to Henry Irving and Joseph Knight and Miss Glyn—talking as certainly no other man in London could have talked about the character of Hamlet, the quality of his courage, and the quality of his timidity. I could tell how I heard a marvellously-gifted girl, Marston's eldest daughter, talking about Swinburne's *Chastelard*, where it was fitted for acting and where unfitted. I could tell how I heard Hepworth Dixon talking to Lady Duffus Hardy about Douglas Jerrold. I could tell all these things—repeat the very words of the interlocutors, so vivid is my recollection of that night. And why is it so vivid? Mainly because on that night I for the first time saw the blind poet, Philip Bourke Marston.

"When I was a boy I once, while wandering along the Norfolk coast, came upon a sea-gull crouched behind a boulder on the wet sand. It sat perfectly still, and did not seem to see me or hear me as I walked towards it along the shore. Having an intimate knowledge of sea-gulls and their ways, I was naturally astonished. But when I got nearer still, and perceived that its eyes were fixed upon the waves that were tumbling in, and that it was apparently absorbed in listening to them, I was more astonished still. Soon, however, I perceived that one of its wings lay spread upon the sand, and that the feathers were dabbled with blood; the wing was broken; it had been shot by some fool, to shoot whom as he pulled his Cockney trigger would certainly have been

no murder. I stooped down to inspect the bird more closely; but still it did not heed me, but crouched, staring straight ahead, listening—listening to the music of the waves. I bent down lower, and looked into its eyes. In them was an expression such as I had never seen in any sea-gull's eyes before.

"Melancholy, unutterable sadness: how feeble seem these words to describe the expression in that sea-gull's eyes! It haunted me for years. The poor bird was blind; yes, a shot, striking it somewhere in the neck or head, paralyzed the optic nerves of both eyes, and the sea-gull was blind, and from the darkness it was listening to the beloved music of the sea. I lifted it up; it knew itself to be helpless, and did not struggle very violently. I carried it to my lodgings, and nursed it as well as I could. I managed to feed it a little by opening its poor beak; but it soon died.

"Now from the day of that bird's death to this moment when I stood before Philip Marston, the expression that haunted me I never saw in any creature's eyes. But I saw it now. It was not an expression of fretfulness; it was one of sad, determined resistance, mixed, however, with that expression of a deep distrust of fate which Keats describes in *Hyperion*—

> 'There was a listening fear in her regard,
> As if calamity had but begun;
> As if the vanward clouds of evil days
> Had spent their malice, and the sullen rear
> Was with its stored thunder labouring up.'

"Not to be reconciled to one's fate—to be chafed by one's infirmities down to the very day of death—is there any hell like this?

"'As a measure of incurable evils the gods have given us unyielding patience,' says the Greek poet.

"I remember finding Rossetti one day in the deepest distress and anxiety under the following circumstances. In response to some verses of Philip Marston's, Rossetti had sent him a sonnet, in which prominent reference had been made to his blindness, and after the posting of the letter he had recalled what I told him of Marston's extraordinary sensitiveness upon the subject. I certainly shared his anxiety. However, it seems that the gratification of receiving such a sonnet from such a man stifled even Philip Marston's pride.

"Irving, Hermann Vezin, and Ada Cavendish—all seemed thoroughly at home at Westland Marston's; but no one more so than R. H. Horne, the author of *Orion*, familiarly known as 'the farthing epic,' on account of his poem having been offered to the public for the smallest coin of the realm. Horne was one of the most prominent men of his time. He was the author of innumerable works. He not only wrote an admirable critical volume, *A New Spirit of the Age*, in collaboration with Mrs. Browning (then Miss Barrett), but he contributed to *Douglas Jerrold's Magazine*, *The Dreamer and the Worker*—a remarkable production. But Horne was not only a poet; he was an adventurer in the best sense of the word. He began life in the Mexican naval

service, and his later days were given to roughing it in the goldfields of Australia.

"R. H. Horne was a schoolfellow of Tom Keats at Edmonton, the younger brother of a certain poet whom *Blackwood's Magazine* immortalized as 'Gallipot Keats,' and it was Horne who one day told me certain romantic incidents wherein he and Charles Wells (the author of *Joseph and His Brethren*) were actors, which form the subject of one of Horne's most charming poems, and Keats at this time was often seen by Horne in the street (while Surgeon Hammond was feeling pulses in the houses), sitting in the doctor's gig (to use Horne's words), 'his head bent low over the dashboard,' apparently dreaming those enchanting daydreams of his which have since become so dear to us—'clasping Diana's waist in some mossy grotto of Latmos,' or 'eating wild honey beneath shadowing cedars on some slope of Lebanon,' for no creature ever was so steeped in beauty as was this doctor's apprentice. As for Charles Wells, school life had no ills for him; for while other boys were fretting and fuming over their books, that vagabond poet, as Horne frequently told me, was thinking of fishing and boating, and roaming over heath and meadow, and enjoying himself with companions of his own kind. The imposition of penal tasks and the threats of the cane were greeted with that merry laugh with which throughout his entire long life he met every ill that fate or chance could offer. Now, if there is no temperament so blessed as that of the vagabond, there is certainly



none so damaging to the one art of all Western civilization—the art of 'getting on.' He made a butt of fortune, and failed in life; but he never repined, knowing that, while the vagabond is enjoying himself in the woods and fields, it is the dull dog that gets on. After leaving school, Horne saw but little of John Keats; but he was told by a medical man who knew Keats intimately that the poet had a constitution of that sensitive kind which in youth is liable to succumb to the assaults of phthisis, but that all he needed for a few years was 'a little peace of mind.' Unluckily, however, the attacks on the 'gallipot poet' were so constant and so spicy that on Keats the effect was melancholy. He became morbid and silent, and would sit for hours without speaking a word. At this time, however, he was actually speculating as to whether he was not bound in honour to 'call out' one at least of the 'Maga' party. Better, perhaps, if he had done so, for, as the furious little R. H. Horne said to me with frothing mouth, 'he was as bold as a young lion and very pugnacious, and the bullies of 'Maga' were like the race of bullies, of the white-livered kind."

On one occasion, while Watts-Dunton and Swinburne were spending one of their "midsummer holidays" at Sark, they received a challenge from the author of the "farthing epic" to swim with him round the island. Needless to say, the challenge was regarded by the two "poet-swimmers" as one of those little pleasantries in

which the ex-officer in the Mexican navy loved to indulge.

Watts-Dunton used to meet R. H. Horne everywhere in literary circles, and they were great correspondents.

It was at one of Westland Marston's receptions that Watts-Dunton told Irving and Joseph Knight about his investigation touching the origin of the plot of the story of *The Bells*. As Irving was acting at the time in this famous melodrama upon which the tale was founded, scarcely any other theatrical subject was discussed among the guests on that Sunday night.

In his letter to the editor of the *Saturday Review* years afterwards (it is dated from The Pines, May 28, 1900), Watts-Dunton gives a concise account of his *Juif Polonais* theory :—

"Your musical critic is quite right," he says, "in supposing that *Le Juif Polonais* is based on a folk story. So long ago as 1873, in a magazine article dealing with the 'Havelock-Hamlet myths' and with the relations between the story of *Lear* and the stories of Dûrghatamas and Jayâtis, I made the following remarks: Stories are a growth. Poetic genius like Shakespeare's does not invent plots, but finds them, seizes hold of them, and, by power of intense vision, lives in them and makes others live in them. Thus, the last new conception in contemporary drama is perhaps the *Polish Jew* of Erckmann-Chatrian. The treatment (in which

pure expectation is the source of interest, unadulterated with surprise) is new. But perhaps older than Zoroaster is the story—Chamisso's tale in verse—where the sun that witnesses the murder does the work of the 'bells'—suggested *Le Juif Polonais*. The most remarkable form that the idea has ever taken is that of the Gypsy conception of the 'Romany Sap,' which I have dwelt upon in *Aylwin*."

Westland Marston's favourite restaurant was the "Solferino," near Leicester Square, and here he would invite Watts-Dunton to dine with him. Joseph Knight and many of the Westland Marston set used also to meet here.

For their meetings at the "Solferino," Watts-Dunton chose Saturday in preference to any other night in the week; for it was the night upon which Philip Marston usually went there with his father. On one memorable night when Watts-Dunton was one of the party, Westland Marston interested his guests in the scenario of a comedy he had sketched out for one of the London theatres. Marston wrote many of his plays by the sea, and on this occasion he was on the eve of starting for a French seaside resort.

The symposia of those days which Watts-Dunton frequented were by no means limited to the Westland Marston nights, or, rather, they might be called "Marston mornings," for those famous gatherings began between nine and ten p.m., and went on frequently until

five in the morning. There were the gatherings at Madox Brown's, where Watts-Dunton as a rule met the same literary and artistic sets that he met at Justin M'Carthy's and elsewhere. He seldom failed to put in an appearance at those Pre-Raphaelite receptions.*

The sudden rise of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, A. C. Swinburne, and William Morris, that seemed to threaten the ascendancy of Tennyson himself, had quite recently occurred. Around this galaxy there clustered, in a remarkably short space of time, a group which it was the fashion to call, especially at these receptions, "the Pre-Raphaelite poets," some of whom yielded, or at least professed to yield, to the influence of Rossetti, some to that of Morris, and some to that of Swinburne. Round them all, however, there was the *aura* of Beaudelaire, or else of Gautier. "These, whom nature had really made very unlike each other," as Watts-Dunton would say, "formed themselves into a set, or rather a sect, and tried apparently to become as much like each other as possible by studying French models, selecting subjects more or less in harmony with the French temper."

That kind-hearted and appreciative "father of the Pre-Raphaelites," Ford Madox Brown, gave all the encouragement in his power to those unfledged bards whom he loved. Rossetti, however, satirically advised

* As early as 1849, the first definite year of Pre-Raphaelitism, Ford Madox Brown exhibited his "King Lear," a work of recognized vigour and originality.

one of the *cénacle* to " quit so poor a language as that of Shakespeare and write entirely in French," which language Morris defined as " nosey Latin."

Some five years later—in 1879—much to the disappointment of every one, Madox Brown left London for Manchester, and therefore ceased to see much of his literary and artistic friends, including even D. G. Rossetti.

" I am dragging on with the ' Flemish Weaver ' on my Town Hall wall," he wrote to Watts-Dunton from Manchester, soon after his severance from his old and much-cherished surroundings at the famous house at 37 Fitzroy Square.

In the seventies, and perhaps still more in the eighties, Watts-Dunton went everywhere and was *persona grata* at all London functions. He took a deep interest in the " Fayre " at the Albert Hall, which his friend Lady Archibald Campbell was so helpful in organizing. In one of the chapters of his novel *Carniola*, he graphically described the bazaar, but afterwards deleted it, as indeed he did a score of descriptions in all his novels of events in society based on personal experience. " I hope you will make a point of coming if you can to the ' Fayre ' at the Albert Hall on the 8th, 9th, and 10th, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday," Lady Archibald wrote to him. " I have got a stall there, so please, if you are tempted to buy, be tempted nowhere but at *Ye Sign of Ye Fleur de Lys*, which is my stall, on the left-hand side of the hall. You must

come so as to see the dresses. All the stallholders are in fancy dress, and my party are in sedan chairs."

Indeed he never, after having once made the plunge into London society, led the life of a recluse; for even when, for a month or two, he went on a midsummer holiday with Swinburne to the seaside, he made a point of keeping himself *au fait* with all that was going on in metropolitan life. Yet the literary toil continued during those early morning hours, in spite of the frequent late hours, either at a political or social function, or literary, artistic, and theatrical At Homes. Moreover, he was a famous first-nighter, especially in the Lyceum days, when Henry Irving was in the zenith of his fame.

The literary dinners at which he was present were endless. He was a frequent visitor at W. B. Scott's house in Chelsea, an old-fashioned residence known as "Bellevue," almost within stone's-throw of Dante Rossetti's house in Cheyne Walk. Here he would meet at dinner in the late seventies Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and still more frequently Leicester Warren.* These dinners, as a rule, were very informal. Bell Scott was often at Rossetti's house, and it was there that Watts-Dunton first met him in the *Examiner* days.

Among the Westland Marston set no one was more appreciated than the author of the touching memoir of Philip Marston, the blind poet—herself a poet—Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton.

* Afterwards Lord de Tabley.

At her American salon in Boston, one met every season for the greater part of half a century the most notable people in the United States—leaders in literature, music, and art. Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Emerson, and others of a kindred nature were among her most cherished friends. But her London salon, which was the centre of literary interest every summer for more than thirty years, proved even more attractive. She often admitted to being, if possible, more deeply attached to her English friends than to her friends across the Atlantic. There was no literary gathering at which Watts-Dunton was more frequently to be seen than at the "Friday At Homes" of Mrs. Moulton's London house. It was here that he used to meet Lowell, with whom he continued on the friendliest terms during the time that the author of the *Biglow Papers* held the appointment of American Minister to Great Britain—that is to say, from 1880 until 1885.

Mrs. Moulton had been early in life introduced into London society by Lord Houghton (1876), where at the moment of her *début* she met Browning, Arnold, and a large number of their contemporaries. The extraordinary charm of her personality, her unmatched enthusiasm for every man and woman that figured in *belles-lettrès*, soon won for her an appreciative circle of celebrities.

It was through Watts-Dunton that Mrs. Moulton made Swinburne's acquaintance. But it was her associations with Whistler, and the incidents relating to her

intimacy with the "butterfly" in the days of their youth, that first roused Watts-Dunton's interest in the American poetess.

One picturesque incident belonging to the earliest chapter, one might say, in Whistler's life, Watts-Dunton heard from Mrs. Moulton. She and Whistler had as children both lived in Pomfret, Connecticut, and attended the same school, from which they often walked home together. On a certain day Whistler had drawn a map of the United States, a marvellous map in many coloured crayons, which so far surpassed those of his classmates as to excite the envy of all. On the way home from school Mrs. Moulton, or little Louise Chandler as she was then, began to bewail the appearance of her own map, a sorry specimen, and to praise the Whistler map. "Ah!" said the boy, "you think that's wonderful, do you? Here—take the map; I don't care anything about it. I'll bring you something to-morrow worth looking at." And without a hint as to the treasure in store, they parted, the precious map in her possession. The next morning, on the way to school, Whistler handed her a carefully wrapped package, which, upon opening it, she found to be a beautiful little painting. The subject, an old monk stooping under a Gothic arch, foreshadowed those wonderful doorways and arches of his Venetian period. This painting always hung on the wall in Mrs. Moulton's American home, and at the Whistler Memorial held in Boston the year after his death, both the painting and

the map were exhibited as the earliest specimens of his work.

Another social function which Watts-Dunton attended, though not frequently, was the famous "Sunday afternoon" at Regent's Park, where George Eliot and George Henry Lewes met their friends.

He was rather oppressed (as Robert Browning is said to have been) by the strenuous atmosphere prevailing at those At Homes, when George Eliot, like a benign sibyl, sat surrounded by her admiring friends, who came up and conversed with her one by one.

Watts-Dunton's opinion of George Eliot, in the heyday of her literary successes, concurred substantially with the clever though unsympathetic sketch given of her by Mrs. Lynn Linton. He also considered her "artificial, *posée*, unreal." It was interesting to compare his impressions with those of a whole-hearted admirer like Mr. Buxton Forman, who knew George Eliot very intimately, and found her one of the most inspiring personalities that he had ever met in his long and varied life, with a soul as great as her mind.

At the same time, Watts-Dunton had a great admiration for George Eliot's earlier fiction, though he did not take so kindly to the work after *Silas Marner*.

It is refreshing to read his thoughtful and sympathetic Introduction to *Silas Marner*,* at a time when George Eliot's name is rarely mentioned except in terms of slighting condemnation. Especially apt is the pas-

* "The World's Classics" edition (Oxford University Press).

sage where, in referring to her power of characterization, he says: "She was no poet, to be sure; but in some of her probings into the deep sophisms by which man's soul shelters itself from the assaults of conscience —the stings of the 'ayenbite of inwyt,' as an old English writer calls these assaults—she ranks not only with the great novelists of the world, but also with the great poets. In the painting of Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*, for instance, she enters into worthy competition with those few masters of tragedy who have ventured to use passive murder as the tragic mischief of drama. Not even Browning, in what is perhaps his masterpiece, *Martin Relph*, is more successful in dealing with this tremendous subject than George Eliot."

Perhaps the article lacks that deep insight into the workings of George Eliot's powerful mind that we meet in the criticism of Richard Holt Hutton, whose analysis of George Eliot's work contained the finest and truest things ever said about her by any writer of her day. But none the less it is a fresh and suggestive piece of writing, and contains an *obiter dictum* that might be written in letters of gold over the writing-table of every novelist :—

"In fiction character is so important that without it a story loses half its grip upon the reader's imagination, and yet the importance of the mere story in keeping imaginative work alive declares itself in every literature.

"This does not in the least mean that character drawing is not a nobler thing than plot invention. And no doubt a good many novels are spoilt by being made subservient to the story. Just as the danger before the novelist of character is that he is liable to waste the excellence of his work upon a poor story, so the danger of the plot-novelist is that he is liable to fashion his characters in order to carry out his plot. . . .

"Now with regard to *Silas Marner*, fascinating, original, and beautiful as is the story, it is quite free from each and all of the infirmities of the mere plot-novelist. The wool-gathering weaver of Raveloe, Eppie the castaway child whom he succoured and who remains so faithful to him when her day of prosperity comes, Godfrey, Dorothy Winthrop, Nancy, and indeed all the characters in the book, are as natural as though they had nothing to do as characters working out a plot story."

VII.

WHISTLER.

VII.

Whistler.

IT was at Mrs. Moulton's "At Homes" that Watts-Dunton and Whistler began to fraternize, and among the picturesque and vital personalities of the mid-Victorian era there was none more attractive than "Jimmy."

Remarkable as an artist, Whistler was no less remarkable as a personality. Not one of the great and compelling personal forces of the age, but fascinating and alive to his finger tips—"alive" as an electric rail is alive—potential alike for mischievous shocks and for useful energy. Picture a short, slim though wiry figure with a large head, unusually broad shoulders, thick, curly black hair, and shrewd, roving eyes set in an olive-tinted face. A glance at the delicately-moulded hands with their long, pointed fingers would suggest that the man was an artist in some medium, and would leave the impression of an attractive personality—the more piquantly attractive for the touch of *grotesquerie* both in figure and in dress. The raven blackness of the shock of hair was relieved by the famous white lock over the right eye (reproduced in stage presentments of Bunthorne), of which Whistler was gleefully vain, calling it

his "white feather." Imagine this figure garbed in a dark sack coat, with a turn-down collar and loose flapping "butterfly" tie of black ribbon. As for hats, in London he usually affected a tall, wide-brimmed hat; when travelling he favoured a soft brown one. But whichever he wore, it was unlike any one else's—either extra tall, or extra wide at the brim—and it was always worn so as to give full effect to the black and white symphony of hair. Then he sported a monocle that accentuated the dandy grace of his manner. He would make great play with his monocle, which, as a rule, boasted no cord, and would sometimes fall out of his eye in the course of an animated conversation. When this happened he would, with elaborate nonchalance, dive into his waistcoat pocket for another glass, and proceed to screw that into his eye. When he discarded the sack coat he wore a dapper frock coat, tightened in at the waist. But he was a thorough *poseur*, and always had to do something different from other men. If he carried a cane it was an extraordinarily long one; if he wore evening dress he discarded a tie; if he wore a tie it was inordinately long. The note of extravagance was as marked a feature of his personality as it was of his brilliant art.

A ready talker, copious in gesture when in the mood, his conversation was salted with a dry, laconic wit tnat speedily became famous, and obviously influenced one of his protégés destined to rival his master as a humorist—Oscar Wilde. One recalls Whistler's

famous retort on the occasion when he had set the table in a roar with a characteristic witticism, and Wilde had exclaimed, "Ah! I wish I had said that." "You will," rapped out Whistler. Small wonder that when these men were competing with each other as brilliant raconteurs, one of the guests looked them both up and down and dryly inquired, "I say, which one of you two invented the other?"

If Whistler said anything in the course of conversation that especially pleased, the jest and the paradox would turn up again and again. He was childishly vain, but used his vanity with a cool insolence that either amused or exasperated—according to the state of his companion's mood. Some have described his voice as pleasant, but it is more often agreed that it was high and rough in quality. The nasal American drawl that he mostly affected somewhat intensified this harsh effect, though undoubtedly it gave an effective "stage" manner to his bitterest sallies.

Watts-Dunton was very intimate with Whistler for a time, as the correspondence between them clearly shows. Many of the letters are familiarly addressed to "Dear Pic," and the Whistler signature—the famous butterfly—never fails to "flaunt its elusive wings," as Watts-Dunton would say, at the close of every missive.

Whistler's reason for addressing his friend as "Pic" arose from the fact that, shortly after making "Jimmy's" acquaintance (all his friends called him "Jimmy," in the same way that Morris was always called "Topsy"),

Watts-Dunton was engaged with him in assisting to "run" a weekly journal known as *Piccadilly*, for which Du Maurier designed the cover, and for which Whistler furnished his first lithographs.

Piccadilly was a nine weeks' wonder. It was started in 1878, and ran its brief course—the first number appearing on the 16th of May, and the last number on the 11th of July.

Watts-Dunton was always regarded by his friends as the "responsible editor" of *Piccadilly*. It would at least seem evident that he was in the editorial chair during the production of the last five numbers of the periodical. The leading article in No. V. is so obviously written by the author of *Aylwin*.*

The favourite rendezvous of Watts-Dunton and Whistler was "The Criterion," and on most afternoons they might be seen in the smoking-room of that restaurant, deep in *Piccadilly* gossip. There was no mistaking the little man with the white feather. He would have been noticeable in any throng. He loved an audience, moreover, and thoroughly enjoyed himself as he puffed cigarettes in rapid succession and rippled off humorous stories.

The two friends were often to be seen driving down Piccadilly in a hansom, Whistler's favourite vehicle. On one occasion while out in one of these cabs, lounging back luxuriously in the seat, a cigarette tilted in his mouth, Whistler suddenly straightened himself,

* See Appendix.

and with the *soupçon* of an ironical smile he flourished his hat elaborately to a lady on the top of a passing omnibus.

"Who is that?" said Watts-Dunton, whose unfortunate short sight frequently brought the accusation upon him of cutting his friends—"who is that, Jimmy?"

"My wife, Pic. There she goes, doing the economies for me—as usual!"

The majority of the Whistler letters were of the breathless, laconic order, and that Butterfly signature came as a finishing touch to the artist's eccentricity.

Piccadilly—a paper savouring of the old *World* and *Vanity Fair*—was financed by a lady named Grant, a well-known novelist at that period. But the magazine did not receive sufficient support from the public, and in July 1878 she decided to stop its career.

In those days Watts-Dunton used to sleep at Rossetti's in Cheyne Walk on Saturday nights, and on Sunday mornings would attend the remarkable breakfasts that Whistler gave. Rossetti, though so near a neighbour, saw little or nothing of Whistler at that time, although some five or six years earlier they had seen a good deal of each other.*

"It was at one of the Whistler breakfasts, at which I was present," Watts-Dunton records,† "that Oscar

* It is an interesting fact that Whistler was introduced to Rossetti by Swinburne on his return from Paris in 1863.

† *Autobiographical Notes.*

Wilde first emerged from obscurity, and began to play his part in the world. His appearance was that of a tall, large-boned, well-made Irishman, with peculiar almond-shaped eyes that at one moment seemed sea-blue, at another sea-green, and, what is still more striking, seemed at one moment as simple as the eyes of a baby, at another as cunning as the eyes of a fox. Although his features were clumsy and plain, thick-lipped, and long-jawed, there was something in the face that was decidedly attractive, and there was an ease in his manner and a music in his voice which were very individual, not to say distinguished. Whistler seemed rather taken by surprise when the new-comer entered; but this did not in the least disturb the splendid ease and *savoir faire* of the new breakfast guest. He was extremely unlike the Oscar Wilde of his subsequent masquerading period. He was dressed with punctilious care and neatness, and although his hair was longer than common, I had been used to mixing with a group of artists and literary men who did not object to long hair.

"At once he laid himself out to make himself agreeable to every guest that came into the room, and in every case he succeeded *à merveille*. It was impossible not to feel interested in him, and, finding myself in a corner of the room with Whistler, I said, 'Who's the smock-faced Irishman, Jimmy?' 'I don't know,' said Whistler. 'What nonsense that is,' I said. 'Of course you know all about him—at least you know where you

found him very well! You have met him at some "outside" dinner where the "etchings" were being bought, and he jumped down your throat as he is jumping down all these throats; and you gave him a general invitation to come to your breakfasts, and he has at once taken you at your word.'

"'Mazing!' said Whistler, suppressing his usual laugh. 'That's just how it was. I met him at dinner last night. I remember now.'

"'And I'm going to tell you something else, Jimmy,' I said. 'This same smock-faced Irishman will appear at every one of the breakfasts until the season is over, and at the end of the season he will know every man and woman worth knowing that *you* know.'

"'Mazing!' said Whistler. 'I think so too. Look how he is jumping down Lady ——'s throat over there! Yes, you're quite right.'

"'And,' said I, 'by the end of next season, where you know one person in society the Irishman will know ten; because you've got your painting to do, while the Irishman has got nothing to do but trot round London and jump down people's throats as a preliminary to his beginning practical work as a writing-man.'

"We sat down to breakfast, and before the breakfast was over I perceived that he had taken Theodore Hook as his model, and I realized the stories that have come to us of the irresistible charm of his great prototype—with the exception of winding up the entertainment with improvised songs at the pianoforte. Wilde

occasion rated his friend Burne-Jones for "taking up with the man who was posing as the leader of the new æsthetic movement." Rossetti, who was in one of his blackest moods on this occasion, must have tried severely the amiability of his friend. Burne-Jones, however, who thought more of Wilde than did either Rossetti or Watts-Dunton, stoutly defended himself.

For a long time friends had urged Watts-Dunton to put right this misconception as to the relations between Wilde and the two poets, Swinburne and Rossetti. But, believing that Wilde's reputation was entirely ephemeral, Watts-Dunton did not think it was worth while to trouble about it. *De Profundis*, however, and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* modified his views about Wilde.

It has been said with some truth, and on more than one occasion in criticisms on Oscar Wilde and his literary work, that the æsthetic movement has one side of something better, which, as represented by the school of Morris and Rossetti, had a permanent influence in English decorative art. And it seems to be taken for granted that the fantastic nonsense of æstheticism had some close relation to the new development of the romantic movement represented by Rossetti, Swinburne, and William Morris. Friends of these great men have been in the habit of smiling at the association, and let the misconception pass by unchallenged. If one were to set to work to challenge and contradict all

the misconceptions regarding great writers and great artists, literature would simply consist of controversies. The fact is, as Watts-Dunton asserted, that "until the publication of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* and *De Profundis*, many students of English letters felt sure that, in spite of all the brilliancy of Oscar Wilde's comedies, his name would not pass into literature.

"This alone seemed to render it unnecessary to set right a prevailing misconception as to Oscar Wilde's relations with the new movement in art and literature." Watts-Dunton considered that the poems, "with all their cleverness, were almost entirely imitative and derivative verses. On one page we would get an imitation of Milton's sonnets so *naïve* that it would make us smile; on the next an equally unblushing imitation of Wordsworth, or of Rossetti, or of Swinburne, or of Keats."

Then as to his story, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Hawthornian in *motif* (so Watts-Dunton thought), it maunders on into scenes that are not Hawthornian, full of the most offensive suggestions. It is a question, however, whether Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin* was not a greater formative influence than anything of Hawthorne's.

"The essays," says Watts-Dunton, "are, no doubt, very brilliant and full of many literary graces; but here again every thought in them has been derived from some previous writer, French or English. It is not till we come to the comedies that we are confronted by real organic work. These undoubtedly are as witty and

as humorous as Sheridan's, and yet they are not imitative of Sheridan, but have a sweet, poetic fancy that is all the dramatist's own. They are the expression of a mind that, after all the contrary evidence of the poems, the novels, and the essays, has really a facet of its own. It is no wonder that the most brilliant and polished man that ever in my time charmed a dinner-table should have an instinctive gift for the dialogue of genteel comedy —should be the one who could with ease shut up the 'Butterfly' himself. Nor is this all. He had an instinctive apprehension of scenic business. And if it were not the fact that every specimen of the acted drama of our time had only ephemeral life, if the acted drama took the place it took in the time of Sheridan, Wilde's plays would have secured for him a recognizable place in English literature. In truth, therefore, the seeds of dissolution were in his first brilliant play on the first night; and those seeds have been germinating ever since. Of course, if things were with us here as they are in France—if people read the acted play of the hour, if they treated them as literature—few plays would be more sure to pass into literature than Oscar Wilde's. And, as I think, for the above reason they will not pass into literature. Oscar Wilde would never have been known in the history of English literature unless he had written *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* and *De Profundis*. Faulty and marred by affectation as is the ballad, in it is nevertheless a vital poem which has survived, partly on account of its strength and partly because there is a

peculiar and narrow place open and ready to receive it, the place devoted to prison rhymes. But *De Profundis* is vital work. It is so painful in its pathos; it is so haunting in its actualizing of the misery of the writer, that I, for my part, deeply regret that I ever read it. I used to see Wilde masquerading in society wherever I went. And now, after reading that terrible book, I see him wringing his hands in his cell and moaning, 'What an ending! what an appalling ending!' I see the gourmet who used to give such perfect lunches at Kettner's and other places, feasting delightfully on a piece of bread because it was white, and picking up every crumb, so that it should not be lost. I see the dandy who did so much to lower idealism and the poetic life in the eyes of the public, marching about dressed like a tailor's bust. I see this same man standing in the rain on the central platform at Clapham Junction, handcuffed with other convicts, dressed in the zany costume that makes even Woe ridiculous. I see him there, pilloried for half an hour, jeered at as Oscar Wilde, as train after train came up; and I see him every afternoon for a year afterwards, recalling that intolerable experience, and weeping for half an hour. I say, I would not have read that book on any account if I had known its enormous power to enslave my imagination. Such work is, as I say, vital; it can never be forgotten; and this makes it imperative upon one who knew the man, and knew the group of poets whom he caricatures, to contradict a very

natural misconception as to what were his relations with them." *

Watts-Dunton frequently met Wilde out at dinner-parties. Although he rated the bulk of Wilde's literary work as negligible, he had the highest opinion of his table talk. Speaking to an admirer of Wilde's a few years ago, he said, " Until I met Wilde I used to consider Meredith as the most brilliant talker of his day; but Wilde excelled Meredith. If Meredith could choose his topic, he was *facile princeps* of any one else at the table; but Wilde could turn—as Meredith could not always do—any chance remark to happy and apt use. He never apparently led the conversation, but would interpose remarks that were not merely delightfully witty, but delightfully provocative. His wit was better tempered than Whistler's; farcically dogmatic, not spitefully dogmatic. In his writing he plagiarized unblushingly, but his talk was often original. Therein lay his *forte*. Nothing he wrote was ever so excellent as his impromptu sallies."

It will be remembered that Morris was struck by Wilde's vein of good-nature. That also impressed Watts-Dunton.

* Curiously enough, Watts-Dunton always underrated the brilliant originality of *The Importance of being Earnest*, where surely Wilde first unmistakably comes into his own, and considered *Lady Windermere's Fan* Wilde's most valuable effort. Yet for all its dramatic force and wit, there are garish touches and echoes of other playwrights that mar the artistic merit of the play as a whole. Whereas *The Importance of being Earnest* is *sui generis*, and the most fresh and most individual thing that Wilde ever wrote.

When *Aylwin* was first published, it was thought that Cyril Aylwin was a portrait of Whistler. This conjecture, however, was proved to be erroneous; for it has been clearly shown, in the Appendix to the latest edition of Watts-Dunton's novel, called "A Key to *Aylwin*," that the original of "Cyril" was Watts-Dunton's brother, a wit and humorist of no mean order. He was Charles Augustus Howell, the prototype of De Castro in the novel, who lived to some extent upon the artistic products of Pre-Raphaelite brains—especially those of Rossetti and Burne-Jones—who afforded Whistler a chance of weaving anecdotes without end; for the quaint and curious stories about Howell, as told by "Jimmy," would set many a Whistler breakfast table in a roar. The favourite breakfast yarns were of Howell's remarkable power of convincing the uncultured *nouveaux riches* of his expert knowledge in recognizing the works of old masters, and how he would succeed in palming off upon these millionaires, "masterpieces" of Michael Angelo, Titian, and especially those of Holbein; and when one of these wealthy "art collectors" would chance to shuffle off this mortal coil and his effects were sold at Christie's, the "old masters" were knocked down, amidst ironical laughter, at something below the original cost of their gilded frames. It was a situation that Sheridan would have appreciated as suggestive of a scene in a society play.

On one occasion, as Whistler would state in his best

style, being a guest at one of these rich men's tables, and happening to express slight dubiety as to the genuineness of some of the "old masters" with which the dining-room walls had been covered by Howell, was never again invited to the "connoisseur's" house.

It was Howell who gave Rossetti the name of "Haroun-al-Raschid," which Watts-Dunton appropriated so aptly in *Aylwin*. He has described Howell as belonging, not merely to the Rossetti group, but to all groups, "for he was brought into touch with almost every remarkable man of his time, and fascinated every one of them. Literary and artistic London was once full of stories of him; and no one that knew him doubted he was what must be called a man of genius, although a barren genius."

No one seemed more interested in the painting of the famous Peacock Room at Prince's Gate than Watts-Dunton. He frequently met Whistler there during the progress of the work. That Peacock Room in Leyland's house was for a time the talk of London. Leyland, the self-made man, who came to be the owner of the Leyland line of steamers, was one of Rossetti's greatest patrons. At Cheyne Walk, Watts-Dunton had every chance of studying his striking personality. It is surprising, therefore, that, having introduced him in *Aylwin*, he merely refers to him as "Symons," and describes him in the one scene in D'Arcy's studio as "an elegant-looking man in a peculiar kind of evening dress," and as "one of D'Arcy's chief buyers."

VIII.

WATTS-DUNTON AT CHEYNE WALK.

VIII.

Watts-Dunton at Cheyne Walk.

IN the midst of all this busy literary and legal activity at Great James Street, still more at Danes Inn, Watts-Dunton, after that first visit to Kelmscott, went frequently down to the old manor house. With scarcely a break, Rossetti resided there for about two years, as stated already. But he returned to Cheyne Walk in July 1874, never visiting Kelmscott again. And it was then, Rossetti having settled in London, that Watts-Dunton almost lived at Cheyne Walk; so frequent, in fact, were his visits, that scarcely a letter of any literary interest was exchanged between himself and the poet-painter, for their correspondence, amounting to scores of letters, none of which Watts-Dunton destroyed, principally relates to the petty details of life, of which Rossetti had his "good average share," as these letters fully show, though the burden of them, like the burden of Swinburne's business affairs, would seem to have been shifted on to the shoulders of that ever accommodating "friend of friends."

It cannot be denied, however, that Rossetti, ill in health and becoming each year more and more de-

pendent on others for diversion, felt deep gratitude—gratitude which, in his letters, he was never tired of reiterating. Watts-Dunton's society became essential to Rossetti's happiness. "You are always most welcome," he would say again and again. But when the welcome friend reached Cheyne Walk, he always found that Rossetti had much to ask his advice about. "I wish to consult you," he would confess in more than one letter, "on a point involving legal issues."

The eagerness with which he looked forward to Watts-Dunton's visits is frequently observable.

"Thanks for your affectionate letter," he writes, on July 21, 1880. "But I must protest that you are never 'uninvited,' seeing that you cannot need a specific invitation, but are a welcome third whoever may be here. In any case it is only lest *you* should be bored that I am anxious. So my last word is, the *more* of your company the better, the *most* possible the best. I have known exactly in each case of late what the preventions were to your getting here on certain days, and been very thankful for your efforts to come on others. . . . William may perhaps be here some time that evening, but he leaves town on Thursday—a sad loss to me in companionship."

Again, on the 18th September of the same year:—

"If you can give me your company to dinner on Sunday I will try to knock up a sonnet between whiles,

and to be less out of sorts than last night. You might, moreover, bring some work of your own. I am sorry I did not see the Forman-Shelley article. This you might, if coming, put in pocket. Let me have just one line to know whether to expect you. . . . When I say *work* of yours, I mean play, poem, tale, or anything."

The endless short letters to Watts-Dunton merely expressed a mood. Rossetti could, however, when so inclined, write a long and interesting letter, as the volumes edited by his brother, Mr. W. M. Rossetti, clearly show.

Being naturally of a sociable disposition, Rossetti was eager to have friends about him on his return from Kelmscott, for as Watts-Dunton realized more than any one, his morbid dislike of being alone had grown upon him. Up to the last days at Birchington-on-Sea, this trait of exacting the company of friends was still apparent. It now became a matter of urgent need that some one among his now very limited circle should put in an appearance, the friends arranging among themselves to relieve each other. They included Bell Scott, Shields, Rossetti's brother, and one or two others. In this way it came about at last that Watts-Dunton had specially appointed afternoons upon which he went to Cheyne Walk from Putney where he now permanently resided, having given up his tenancy at Danes Inn. He was living now with his brother-in-law, Mr. Charles Mason, at 3 Putney Hill, opposite The Pines, and afterwards at Ivy Lodge, Werter Road, a street leading out

of the Putney High Street, where he remained until September 1879, when the famous days at The Pines with Swinburne began.

When staying the night at Cheyne Walk, Watts-Dunton would follow his familiar habit of early rising, and put in quite a long morning's work for the *Athenæum*. His favourite corner on these occasions was the recess in the central window of the drawing-room overlooking the Chelsea Embankment, with the river in the foreground and Battersea Park beyond. This was the room in which a large part of *Atalanta* was written just ten years earlier (1864, and published in 1865). Watts-Dunton had, in fact, often completed a good day's work before Rossetti came downstairs to his midday breakfast, as at Kelmscott, when he would grumble over his invariable dish of eggs and bacon at the "baneful and unpoetic habit of early rising."

After breakfast Watts-Dunton joined him in the studio, where Rossetti would paint with amazing energy as long as the light would permit. Then the two friends used frequently to dine alone. Rossetti, however, was never partial to dining at home, and took far more kindly to some bohemian restaurant, especially if he could persuade his companion to accompany him; he was ever partial to Pope's "dear, damned, distracting town." After dinner the poet-painter would take leave of his friend and go forth into the night, either driving in a cab to some open spot, such as the outskirts of Regent's Park, or else for a walk along the Thames

Embankment to Blackfriars Bridge, returning home in the small hours of the morning, by which time Watts-Dunton, if at Cheyne Walk, had retired to his "haunted" bedroom.

No wonder "Watts-Dunton's room," as it came to be called, got the reputation of being haunted; for it was hung about with sombre hangings and antique picture panels. A candle, indeed, seemed only to make the gloom the more apparent. Scattered about the room in most admired disorder were some outlandish and unheard-of books, and all kinds of antiquarian and Oriental oddities, which books and oddities Rossetti had picked up at various times during his ramblings about Chelsea and elsewhere—such as old carved heads and grinning gargoyles, and Burmese and Chinese Buddhas in soapstone of every degree of placid ugliness. By way of contrast, however, there was in this haunted-looking chamber one piece of carved Italian marble in bas-relief, of great interest and beauty. Rossetti, who was an expert buyer of articles of vertu, took a humorous delight when out on an "old curiosity expedition" among the Hebrews in Wardour Street and elsewhere, in disguising himself in poverty-stricken attire in order to strike bargains among the dealers of the tribes of Shylock and Shem.

But Rossetti's own bedroom was scarcely less weird in character. There again were to be seen heavy curtains drawn closely round an antiquated four-post bedstead, and even the windows in deep recesses were

draped with massive hangings of Genoese velvet. Rossetti, who at the Kelmscott old manor house favoured the idea of the place being haunted, encouraged stories of ghosts about the old Chelsea mansion, and although, as he declared, he never saw a spectre, one was seen by a servant in November 1870, and described as "a woman who sometimes appeared at the top of the second flight of stairs."

Never was a residence more crowded with beautiful and costly objects than that old Tudor house, the oldest in the neighbourhood, and supposed to be the house that Thackeray mentions in *Esmond* as the home of the Countess of Chelsey. The furniture consisted largely of quaintly-carved oak, and among the endless articles of curiosity was that fine collection of blue china which, regardless of risk, Rossetti used at the dinner parties which in the earlier days he was so fond of giving.

A description of Rossetti's garden at Cheyne Walk has been given by Watts-Dunton in *Aylwin*. "It was large, and so neglected and untrimmed as to be a veritable wilderness. While I was marvelling why it should have been left in this state, I saw the eyes of some animal staring at me from a distance, and was soon astonished to see that they belonged to a little Indian bull. My curiosity induced me to go into the garden and look at the creature. He seemed rather threatening at first, but after a while allowed me to go up to him and stroke him. Then I left the Indian bull and explored this

extraordinary domain. It was full of unkempt trees, including two fine mulberries, and surrounded by a very high wall. Soon I came across an object which at first seemed a little mass of black and white oats moving along, but I presently discovered it to be a hedgehog. It was so tame that it did not curl up as I approached it, but allowed me, though with some show of nervousness, to stroke its little black snout. As I walked about the garden I found it was populated with several kinds of animals such as are never seen except in menageries—wombats, kangaroos, and the like, formed a kind of happy family."

That little Indian bull, however, on one occasion treated Rossetti with far less courtesy than Watts-Dunton seemed to have won, if there be any truth in the "Whistler yarn" Watts-Dunton loved to relate.

One day, while Rossetti and Whistler were inspecting the pet, the poet-painter, pointing a stick at it, dwelt upon its beauties, and so roused in the animal a blaze of indignation. With a sudden and almost super-bovine energy, the "pet" tore up by the roots the tree to which it was attached, and chased Rossetti round the garden. Rossetti's escape, after a good deal of dodging behind trees, was at last effected through the animal being hampered in its onslaught by the disrooted tree.

The studio at Cheyne Walk where Watts-Dunton spent with Rossetti so many memorable evenings has been described not only by the author of *Aylwin* him-

self, but by other men of letters who have written about the poet-painter :—

> " Sitting with him, his tones as Petrarch's tender,
> With many a speaking vision on the wall,
> The fire ablaze, flashing the studio fender,
> Closed in from London shouts and ceaseless brawl." *

William Sharp used to speak of Rossetti's house in Chelsea as " the Mecca of the romantic devotee in both pictorial and literary art." And Watts-Dunton has always declared, in talking of his fellowship with Rossetti at Cheyne Walk, that he had the gift of irresistible fascination. " Generosity and geniality incarnate," he has said, " was the mysterious poet-painter to those he loved ; and if the budding bard yearned for sympathy, as he mostly does, he could get quite as much as he deserved, and more, at 16 Cheyne Walk."

" To say that any artist could take a deeper interest in the work of a friend than in his own seems bold ; yet this could be said of Rossetti. The mean rivalries of the *littérateur* that so often disgust us found no place in that great heart. To hear him recite in his musical voice the lyric of some unknown bard—recite it in such a way as to lend the lines the light and music of his own marvellous genius, while the bard sat by with head bowed low so that the flush on his cheek and the moisture in his eye should not be seen—this was an experience that did indeed make the bardic life worth living."

And while Rossetti was entertaining his guests it

* *The New Day*, by Gordon Hake.

was not an unusual occurrence to see, creeping from under a sofa cushion at Rossetti's head, a wombat, or some other pet animal belonging to the Cheyne Walk menagerie.

They talked together—Rossetti and Watts-Dunton—in that studio at 16 Cheyne Walk, on a thousand and one subjects of interest in literature and art. Watts-Dunton once questioned Rossetti as to whether the tradition that the first edition of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, the astronomer-poet of Persia, was reduced in price until it was ultimately sold for a penny, rested on any basis of ascertained fact. This the poet-painter confirmed, assuring him that *he* was the first to discover the "penny box"—not Swinburne—in 1859, containing the "small grey pamphlet." Having shown Swinburne his "find," the author of *Atalanta* instantly purchased a copy, and never tired in after years of laughingly boasting about its "denarian cost."

Every nook and corner of that studio seemed filled with an artistic atmosphere. For a year and more, during the time that Watts-Dunton was there almost daily, the famous "Dante's Dream," upon which Rossetti frequently worked, was on the large easel. Rossetti had induced Valpy, the owner of the picture, to return it to him, it being understood that he would replace it by painting other works of equal value. The picture was spoken of by more than one art critic as "a work that would fifty years hence be named among the half-dozen supreme pictures of the world." But Watts-

Dunton not only had the privilege of studying the picture to his heart's content; he was thrown into the society of all the interesting models immortalized in that masterpiece. Mrs. Stillman (*née* Spartali), a famous beauty, who sat as the model for the figure at the bed's head, was the daughter of the consul-general for Greece, and was well known to Watts-Dunton; while Mrs. Morris, the Beatrice in the painting, was, as already shown, one of his most intimate friends.

There were, moreover, many pictures by intimates of Rossetti's on the studio walls, and he prized none more than Smetham's; indeed, Rossetti used to declare that, since William Blake, there had been no more visionary painter in the art world than his old friend.*

Rossetti had a visit from Longfellow, who knew nothing whatever of the painter's art. He was, however, very polite and complimentary, as was only to be expected in a man so courteous by nature. But, on taking his leave of Rossetti, Longfellow said: "I've been glad to meet you, and should like to have met your brother. Pray tell him how much I admire his beautiful poem, *The Blessed Damozel*." Rossetti, without a hint of the error, promised to do so, as he shook hands at the studio door. Although Rossetti often laughed with Watts-Dunton over the "ignorance" displayed by the author of *Hiawatha* on that occasion, he could not but admit that he would have enjoyed a

* There is a picture of Smetham's at The Pines, depicting a dragon in a fen, of which D. G. Rossetti had a great opinion.

talk about his own work with a brother bard whom he had always regarded as a poetic critic worth listening to. It was a curious fact, as Watts-Dunton would remark about his own name, how frequently people in literary society failed to distinguish him—before he took the name of Dunton—from G. F. Watts, the artist. Not even the marked difference between "William" and "Dante Gabriel," it would appear, could prevent the confusing of names arising through two Rossettis being in the field at the same time.

During one of their talks Rossetti admitted that he was utterly insensible to the charm of music. Poets, as a rule, were not in his estimation in any sense musically gifted.

He would say, when taxed about his "lack of appreciation," that his opinion about music was "very much the same as that of Dr. Johnson," who declared that "of all noises it was, perhaps, the most bearable." Speaking of a performance of the *Messiah* at the Crystal Palace, which he once witnessed, the poet-painter whimsically declared that it seemed to him that "everybody got up and shouted at him as loudly as possible."

One of the most interesting subjects upon which Watts-Dunton and Rossetti talked together was the subject of that projected poem, *Michael Scott's Wooing*, which they discussed at their first meeting at Kelmscott, and about which Watts-Dunton wrote at some length in a letter dated Danes Inn, December 6, 1875 :—

"MY DEAR ROSSETTI,

"I am but just this moment able to get my mind upon the story we talked of, and even now I cannot for the life of me recollect the form it took when I gave it to you; in fact, I seem not to have even, as far as I remember, done more than give you a hint of the plot. This is how I have told it.

"Between the families of McGregor and Morrison there had been a long-standing feud about a certain 'linn' which divided the properties of the two. The linn in question was a haunted one—haunted by the ghost of a certain beautiful girl named Grissel Morrison, who had been drowned in the linn by a young McGregor in times past, after having been seduced by him. This ghost was only seen on rare occasions—on the eve of some momentous event about to happen in the McGregor family, such as a wedding—when it behoved the members of the family to carefully avoid going near the linn, as she could call them by her beauty to do some act false to the happiness of the family.

"How a certain Donald McGregor from his childhood had lived with an aunt in England. On the first evening of his return how he had, while strolling near the linn, seen in the gloaming, just while the dying light of sunset was becoming mingled with the light of the red harvest-moon, a lovely young girl walking so close to the edge of the linn that, fearing she would fall over, he rushed towards her to save her, but she looked at him with such a bewitching smile, and seemed so

confident of her foothold as she stood poised on a large stone, that his fears soon became lost in his admiration. While he stood transfixed he was rudely seized from behind, and a rough voice asked him 'What he did trespassing there?' It was Morrison, the owner of the land upon which he stood, who had been walking over his fields, and came unobserved upon the trespasser.

"Donald, after the first surprise, turned (when he had shaken Morrison off) to look at the girl again. She was gone.

"He asked Morrison where was the girl. Morrison laughed roughly in his face, and asked if he was daft. But afterwards, fancying that he had designs upon his daughter (whom Donald had never even seen), told him that if ever he saw him there again he would pitch him into the linn.

"Donald went away deeply mystified, and deeply in love. Shortly afterwards, when at church, he sat behind a young girl whose figure (for he could not see her face) affected him in a strange way, and when, at the end of the service, she turned round, he exclaimed, 'The Lady of the Lynn!' His mother, who sat next him, turned pale with fright at his words, and, whispering, asked him what he meant. He said he had seen her at the linn. This made his mother so ill that she fainted, and had to be taken from church. Donald, as he went out with his mother, had to pass the pew in which the girl was, and now saw that the man sitting with her was old Morrison. In fact the girl was Jane Morrison,

Morrison's only child. His mother upon reaching home told him for the first time of the legend, and implored him not to go near the linn any more. His desire to do so, however, was, of course, irresistible, and he went every evening at the same time, but saw nothing. At church he was a *very* regular attendant, in the hope of seeing the girl there; but in vain! She never went again. Her father, in fact, having seen Donald's look at her as he passed the pew, had carefully arranged that she always went to a chapel some distance off, and never again took her to church. Donald's mother, equally anxious that her son should not meet Jane Morrison, sent him away to his aunt again.

"A year elapsed, and then, on the death of his mother, Donald came home for good. On the very evening of his mother's funeral he strolled out again to the linn at the same hour, and there, at the very same spot, he saw, as he thought, the same lovely girl whom he had seen in church, but dressed in a graceful manner.

"He went up to her and spoke to her.

"It was Jane Morrison. They fell violently in love with each other from that moment, and used to meet secretly at the linn very often in the evening.

"Morrison, however, discovered this, and forbade his daughter to go to the linn, or to leave the house without his consent.

"Some time afterwards he forced her to accept the hand of a man of some property, named David Muir.

The girl pined away, and her father kept her a close prisoner.

"Donald now grew frantic. He was constantly at the linn, but of course saw nothing of her. At last, however, to his unspeakable joy he one evening saw, as he thought, his beloved Jane standing at the very spot where he first had seen her. He rushed towards her, crying, 'Jane, Jane, my darling Jane!' When he got to her, however, he found that it was not his Jane, but another girl dressed in antique costume, but so exactly like her in feature and expression that he could not help again crying out, 'Jane, Jane, my darling!'

"She answered him with a bewitching smile, and said, 'I am not Jane Morrison, but I am a friend of *yours*, and I am here to tell you something: Jane Morrison is to be married to-morrow.'

"He shrieked out in an agony of love and rage combined. 'I will go and tear her from the house,' he cried. 'You can never do that,' said the person he was talking to, 'but I can tell you how to bring her here.' 'How?' cried Donald. 'Take this hazel wand,' said she.

"Donald now perceived that she held in her hand a short forked stick. He took the wand. 'Now,' said she, 'point it towards Mr. Morrison's house.' He did so; then said she, 'Cry out, "Jane, Jane Morrison, it is Donald's soul calling to thine. Come, come to the linn."'

"Presently he saw a figure hurrying over the fields,

and he perceived that she was in her nightdress, weeping violently. He ran towards her, crying out, 'Jane, my darling, my darling!' But he stood aghast at what he saw. Her mouth was open, her lips were blue, her eyes were widely distended. Her face was of marble whiteness, while, with her hair flowing wildly down her nightdress, she threw out her hands as if to repel some horrible object, sobbing out, 'The linn! the linn! Father, father, save me from the linn! Donald is drawing me to the linn!' Donald tried to stay her, but he could not. She looked at him scared, and then seemed to see nothing but the linn—to which she was being drawn by the fascination of repulsion like that which impels one on a giddy height to hurl himself into the very gulf which appals him, or like that which, in the depths of a tropical forest, draws the frightened bird fluttering and aghast into the very fangs of the serpent.

"She rushed to the brink of the linn, and before Donald could prevent it, threw herself over.

"Donald was about to follow her, when again he was seized by old Morrison, who, panting for breath, and but half dressed, as though just risen from bed, said, 'Donald McGregor, for God's sake tell me what has been done!' Donald pointed to the spot where he saw Jane sink. 'Your daughter is there,' he said. 'Let me follow her. I may yet save her.' And he struggled to jump into the linn. 'That I know to be a lie,' said Morrison, 'for I have left her in bed in a

terrible nightmare from which I cannot awaken her, and she is calling out, "Save me, father; save me, father! Donald is dragging me to the linn."'

"'Left her in bed!' said Donald. 'Then go back, old man, and you'll find her dead.' At that moment the figure of a young woman rose. Donald jumped in and clasped her. They both sank, as though they had been of lead. Morrison jumped and dived many times where they had sunk, but found no traces of them. He went home fully believing that his daughter was dead. But his wife met him at the door, and said that the girl had now come to. Morrison went to his daughter, and found her in a very distressed state of mind. She told him that she had had a terrible dream. She thought Donald and a skeleton that were standing beside the linn had called her and drawn her against her will to the linn. That she had leaped in, and that afterwards Donald and the skeleton had followed her, and she had seen them both—Donald and the skeleton —sink, clasped in each other's arms.

"I hope you may be able to transmute the above into Rossettian gold.

"Yours affectionately,

"W. T. WATTS."

Some twenty years later Watts-Dunton wrote thus about Rossetti:—

"Rossetti's own method of mentally cartooning a subject for future treatment is illustrated in so inter-

esting a manner by the prose sketch for a poem called *Michael Scott's Wooing*, that the student will thank us for directing attention to it.* Here is the prose sketch found by the editor in those neat manuscript books which are objects of affectionate reverence to all who enjoyed the high privilege of Rossetti's friendship :—

"Michael Scott and a friend, both young and dissolute, are returning from a carouse, by moonlight, along a wild sea-coast during a ground swell. As they come within view of a small house on the rocky shore his companion taunts Michael Scott as to his own passion for the maiden, Janet, who dwells there with her father, and as to the failure of the snares he has laid for her. Scott is goaded to great irritation, and as they near the point of the sands overlooked by the cottage, he turns round on his friend and declares that the maiden shall come out to him then and there at his summons. The friend still taunts and banters him, saying that wine has heated his brain; but Scott stands quite still, muttering, and regarding the cottage with a gesture of command. After he has done so for some time the door opens softly, and Janet comes running down the rock. As she approaches she nearly rushes into Michael Scott's arms, but instead swerves aside, runs swiftly by him, and plunges into the surging waves. With a shriek Michael plunges after her, and strikes out this side and that, and lashes his way among the billows

* Unfinished *Life of Rossetti*, by Watts-Dunton, unpublished.

between the rising and sinking breakers, but all in vain—no sign appears of her. After some time spent in this way he returns almost exhausted to the sands, and, passing without answer by his appalled and questioning friend, he climbs the rock to the door of the cottage, which is now closed. Janet's father answers his loud knocking, and to him he says, 'Slay me, for your daughter has drowned herself this hour in yonder sea, and by my means!' The father at first suspects some stratagem, but finally deems him mad, and says: 'You rave; my daughter is in her bed.' 'Go seek her there,' answers Michael Scott. The father goes up to the daughter's chamber, and, returning very pale, signs to Michael to follow him. Together they climb the stair, and find Janet half lying and half kneeling, turned violently round, as if, in the act of rising from her bed, she had again thrown herself backwards and clasped the feet of a crucifix at her bed-head; so she lies dead. Michael Scott rushes from the house, and, returning maddened to the seashore, is with difficulty restrained from suicide by his friend. At last he stands like a stone for a while, and then, as if repeating an inner whisper, he describes the maiden's last struggle with her heart. He says how she loved him, but would not sin; how, hearing in her sleep his appeal from the shore, she almost yielded, and the embodied image of her longing came rushing out to him; but how in the last instant she turned back for refuge to Christ, and her soul was wrung from her by the struggle of her

heart. 'And as I speak,' he says, 'the friend who whispers this concerning her says also in my ear how surely I am lost.'

"Mr. W. M. Rossetti's note upon the above sketch is especially interesting as an illustration of the care and intelligence with which these volumes are edited:—

"'The present project of a poem, or perhaps rather of a prose story, is entirely different in its incidents from any of the designs which he made of *Michael Scott's Wooing*—so far, at least, as my knowledge of them extends. From the character of the handwriting I judge this skeleton-narrative to be two or three years later than *The Orchard Pit*, etc.'

"And, as a matter of fact, the mental cartoon in question was effected, as Mr. W. M. Rossetti infers, two years later than the cartoon of *The Orchard Pit*, and effected under the following circumstances. Many years ago Rossetti had designed a picture called *Michael Scott's Wooing*, and the subject, or rather the mere *name* of the subject, had a peculiar fascination for him. For years he had wished to write a poem to be called *Michael Scott's Wooing*, and had 'cartooned' many ideas for it, but had never been able to satisfy himself, till at last an incident occurred during that long seclusion at Kelmscott Manor, where, as he used to say, he had seen just a dozen people in two years, which set him seriously thinking about it. In the quaint old tapestried chamber that served for studio

the evenings used to be whiled away by story-telling and discussing plots for poems and subjects for pictures. On one of these occasions I, knowing something of the Welsh gypsies, repeated to Rossetti an anecdote which had been told to me as a 'quite true fack' by a Romani girl—an anecdote touching another Romani girl, whose wraith, having been spirited away in the night from the 'camping place' by the incantations of a wicked lover, had been seen rushing towards Lake Ogwen in the moonlight, 'while all the while that 'ere same chavi wur asleep an' a-sobbin' in her daddy's livin' waggin.' Rossetti was greatly struck by this story, and immediately the subject for *Michael Scott's Wooing* was 'mentally cartooned,' and even the metre of the ballad was decided upon. But unfortunately for poetic art, I not long afterwards came upon a story by the Ettrick Shepherd called *Mary Burnet*, and discovered that either my gypsy friend's 'quite true fack' was a Romanized version of Hogg's story, or both she and Hogg had drawn from some old Scottish legend. Anyhow, the story having once appeared in print, Rossetti's interest in his 'mental cartoon' began to cool, and he turned his attention to another story, *The Cup of Water*—a story which also had its birth in what he used to call 'The Kelmscott Nights' Entertainments.'"

Although, as Watts-Dunton has remarked, Rossetti never exhibited any sense of humour in his poetry,

except in the one instance of *Jan Van Hunks*, yet in his social intercourse he was full of humorous sallies.* On one occasion the housekeeper at Cheyne Walk, when asked what there was for dinner, chanced to mention that among the vegetables prepared there was a dish of "cooked salary." When she left the room Rossetti turned to Watts-Dunton with a humorous twinkle in his eye, and said: "Cooked salary! I've heard of cooked accounts—but cooked salary—No!"

But his humour was not always of a delicate order. "Topsy has the greatest capacity for producing and annexing dirt of any man I ever met," was, if humorous, somewhat relentless in the way of criticism upon William Morris's personal appearance. The same may be said of him when, on observing two camels belonging to a menagerie walking awkwardly down the street, he remarked: "Ruskin and Wordsworth out for a stroll!" Perhaps one of the best things he said was to Burne-Jones. On perceiving, when entering the studio, that there were no volumes on the shelf, he said: "Books are clearly of no use to a painter except to prop up models upon in difficult positions."

Rossetti was frequently in a state of restlessness all the years he lived at Cheyne Walk—especially during this latter period—frequently on the lookout for another house in London or a new abode in the country or at the seaside, to which, having found something apparently suitable, he would migrate for a year or so, as

* See *Essay on Poetry*, in *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

we have seen, but sooner or later, growing weary of the residence and its surroundings, would return to Cheyne Walk and soon appeal to Watts-Dunton to try and discover "new scenery." He even wrote to his friend on one occasion, while he was staying at his old home in Huntingdonshire, at the time of his mother's last illness, "It strikes me to ask—Would there be any likely place to suit me in the St. Ives neighbourhood?"

IX.

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI IN HIS LATER DAYS.

IX.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti in his Later Days (1875–82).

(i.) *At Bognor.*

ABOUT a year after his return to Cheyne Walk from Kelmscott (1875), Rossetti went to Bognor. There, among other friends, Watts-Dunton went to see him, and there Rossetti remained for the greater part of a year.

In a letter, dated Aldwick Lodge, at Bognor, October 20, 1875, Rossetti writes to Watts-Dunton :—

"This place is quite a pleasant sojourn, but weather is against us just now. I hope, however, we are not to miss your visit, as indoors or out we shall be sure to get on better with you. I am beginning to give you up to-day, and so write this line. We find some minor matters in the house not quite satisfactory, as, for instance, the absence of winter curtains to the windows —muslin ones at this season make one feel like a ballet girl with a strong draught from the side scenes. I believe the good landlady has carried them with her to another house near here."

Among the material for a Rossetti *Life*, Watts-Dunton preserved a record of how "on November 14, 1875, about a month before the memorable Christmas gathering at Bognor, there was a tremendous gale on that coast, and how Cabbell's Wall (Cabbell was a famous local philanthropist of the period), at the end of Baron Grant's wilderness, was sapped—a wilderness which Rossetti had serious thoughts of buying or renting."

Rossetti, in a letter to Watts-Dunton, thus describes this storm :—

"The gale here since last night has been something appalling and without cessation—havoc on all hands, and the sea higher than it has been known to come for eighteen years. The fine elm tree in the centre of the lawn is uprooted, and the cows are feeding on its prostrate branches. To-morrow it will be cleared away and leave a blank. When I took my house at Chelsea, a large tree—one of the finest in the Walk—(in front of my gate) fell after I had been there a month or two. When I settled at Kelmscott, three of the tercentenary trees of the avenue toppled over one another and lay headlong—I think you were there at the time; and now this tree here; the feature of the view is gone as soon as I arrive!"

In another letter he speaks of how Mrs. Morris and her daughter May were staying at Bognor in March 1876, and remained for a fortnight or more, and how he (Rossetti) on that occasion repainted the Venus from

Mrs. Morris to his entire satisfaction, with the two attendant spirits for which May sat.

Later on, in a letter dated November of the same year, in writing to Watts-Dunton, he says :—

"I am very sorry I am not likely to see you again just now. I now find that it would be practicable to invite you to come on as soon as you like on receipt of this letter, and stay till Tuesday of next week; in case this increased time made the journey better worth while, which I felt from the first to be rather a tax, though I know what you tell me of having enjoyed our intercourse here is as absolutely true as the same statement would be and is on my own part. I find on reflection that the matter I needed to speak to you about could only be dealt with in personal consultation. But if other engagements take you elsewhere, that is of course final.

"The violent weather has quite subsided since I wrote you. Yesterday was extremely fine—to-day dull but not amiss."

At Christmas 1875 there was a gathering of the Rossettis. Watts-Dunton was there, with a few other friends. He has related how, in that bleak wintry season, he would tramp with Rossetti over the boulders along the seashore towards Selsey Bay, and how during these walks Rossetti scarcely ever spoke, and took no heed of the scene. Rossetti's silence and the slippery boul-

ders made the walks more a matter of duty towards a sick friend than a matter of pleasure, for it is the roughest piece of beach on the Sussex coast.

That Christmas at Bognor, in spite of Rossetti's depression, was full of pleasing recollections—

> "... happy days with Gabriel by the sea,
> Who gathered round him those he loved. ..."

as Gordon Hake, who was one of the guests on that occasion, has recorded in *The New Day*.

Aldwick Lodge has been described by Watts-Dunton as a goodly-sized villa in its own grounds on the west side of Bognor. The house was commodious, with a gallery of bedrooms upstairs, ending with a large apartment which Rossetti used as a studio.

While at Bognor Rossetti was very active at his easel, being constantly occupied in painting. But except during those Christmas holidays, he led the most secluded life that he ever led before or afterwards, suffering most of the time from ill-health. That Watts-Dunton, however, made every exertion to entertain Rossetti during his visits there, is shown in a letter of Gordon Hake's dated from Bognor, in which he says, "Rossetti has been talking very much of your plots for novels and your other amusing powers."

In a sonnet called *The Two Christmastides*, which appeared in the *Athenæum* of January 12, 1895, Watts-Dunton recalls that Christmas at Bognor of "twenty years ago."

On the 26th of January Rossetti wrote to Watts-Dunton from Bognor: "I propose to return to town late to-morrow night (Monday). Could you call in on your way to town on Tuesday and see me about ten or eleven?"

"It was about this time," to quote further from these unpublished Watts-Dunton "notes," "that Rossetti, when on the point of leaving Bognor to return to Cheyne Walk, showed signs of that same extraordinary restiveness which has been the subject of so much comment," and "for two or three years following this stay at Bognor, besides myself and his assistant, Treffry Dunn, he saw only about a dozen people. Yet he was doing admirable work both in poetry and in painting."

During an illness at Cheyne Walk, after his return from Bognor, he writes :—

"My dear Watts,

"Thanks for your letter. I shall be but too glad to see you again. I have finished *Van Hunks*, and should like to read it to you. Of course there is a lot of it that is very level—but I don't think it is bad. It is 44 stanzas.

"There is a Frenchman who wants to get a photo of 'Dante's Dream' for publication in a book on Art in Paris. I have written to Samuelson, but don't know if it can be done.

"Your ever affectionate,

"D. G. Rossetti."

In another letter of this period, when he was too ill to leave the house, he says, with that sense of gratitude to Watts-Dunton so frequently expressed in his letters, as already mentioned: "My health is precarious and my state altogether uncertain. I grieve to see so much untiring effort on your part with no response possible on mine."

(ii.) *At Herne Bay.*

In almost the only reference that Watts-Dunton has made to Herne Bay, where he went to visit Rossetti in August 1877, some two years after the sojourn at Bognor, he says:—

"It was after an illness resulting from a severe operation that left Rossetti in a state of the greatest weakness, that John Marshall, his old friend and medical attendant, advised that the poet-painter should be taken to the seaside. Herne Bay, as being near London, was the place selected—or rather a little place called Hunter's Forestall." He was taken thither by Madox Brown, who wrote to Watts-Dunton on August 21, 1877: "Here we are in a delightful little house—and the Nurse and I have between us got D. G. R. into habits of regularity and reason, very much to the benefit of his *physic* as Mrs. Gamp might call it. He walks, sleeps nine hours, and gives up coughing when reminded; but whether it will ultimately benefit him

remains to be seen. He particularly requests you to come and stay here when his mother and sister come. Of course it would be the best thing for him if you could."

Watts-Dunton further relates how "in a very short time Mrs. Rossetti, Christina and myself went down to Herne Bay, and found Gabriel in a lamentable state of depression."

That Watts-Dunton during this time, and, indeed, until the time of his death, was the most helpful and sympathetic friend Rossetti ever had, with the exception of his own devoted brother, is clearly shown by scores of letters of appeal, if by nothing else, to go to him at Cheyne Walk.

"*Jan.* 30, 1880.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I'll hope to see you to-morrow, and write to ask you to bring any poetry you may have done, or any further revised versions of those two delightful sonnets. I don't know whether it will be practicable to read the Beryl Songs while Sharp is here, as they cannot be understood without the poem. If you'll be here about 6 (or earlier if you like) I'll read them before he comes, or else when he's gone.

"The songs are mere chaunts—those songs having no division of stanzas.

"Your affec.

"D. G. R."

"*Feb.* 7, 1880.

"I'll hope to see you on Sunday as early as you can manage—with a budget of Sonnets if it may be. I on my part have besonneted The Sonnet itself at last, however."

* * * * *

"31 *March*, 1880.

"I know you'll try and come if you can, and if so, I should be much obliged if you'd bring me Masson's *Chatterton*, unless cumbrous. In such case perhaps the Chivers-Poe volume instead.

"I've worked a personal phrase into Berold's narrative at the outset, and also worked in a personal line where the King's state is described—also the sea-bird passage, which tells well. Have improved the Chatterton Sonnet in one or two respects. I reflected that my meaning in the line—

"'Even to that unknown shrine else deified'

was not that it would have been deified if known, but would have been so except for the interruption of his work by the death he chose. Thus I find my first scribble when the 'unknown' was an amendment on 'secret, 'sacred,' and 'inmost.' I propose now that the line run—

"'Even to that inmost shrine else deified.'"

* * * * *

"*7 April*, 1880.

"Try and fix Saturday or Sunday for another meeting at dinner. I have written a Sonnet which arose partly out of something you said. Bring that *Poem* and more Sonnets too if you can."

* * * * *

"*Nov.* 25, 1880.

"Come as early as you can to-morrow (Saturday), like a good fellow. I should like to look with you at the two copies of the Sonnet. I hope you will not think me captious, but *all* the changes do not seem to me for the better, and I fear the general theme has lost somewhat in clearness."

* * * * *

"*Nov.* 25, 1880.

"I think the main idea of your sonnet unquestionably grand and valuable, and it is thoroughly brought out. I thought you would not mind my expressing views on some point of detail by tattooing the MS.—in pencil only. What I further feel about it is a certain want of complete subtlety in execution. This quality seems to me the distinctive life of the Sonnet as separating it from other forms, or from what might go on at indefinite length. Mentally, the idea is so very compact. The 'claw-like footprint' seems hardly to suit a *skeleton*—but indeed both phrases seem too distinct for me. Indeed, if the picture part of the Sonnet were made less material and less abruptly emphatic, its execution would be more to my own taste.

"In mental value I think the Sonnet superior rather than inferior to your last printed one.

"Again, the closes of lines and syllabification generally appear to me to lack artistic variety.

"I wish I kept pace with you. No new sonnet yet from me. I shall be very anxious to see you on Saturday, and hope to find you well. I shall give careful directions about the room, but have thought, if you could manage some other room here, it might prove warmer. But certainly *back* is preferable to front on account of noise."

* * * * *

Rossetti was very frank in his criticism of any of the sonnets that Watts-Dunton took to Cheyne Walk to "consider" with his friend before sending on a contribution to the *Athenæum*. On one occasion he writes :—

"I'm sure you won't mind my saying that the Sonnet does not at all strike me as up to your mark. The sestette especially seems violent and not truly striking, and surely a serpent has no song. You can afford to let one speak one's mind on one occasion, after such fine work as you have lately printed. It might nevertheless be better to speak less decidedly, did I not fear that this would certainly, if printed, not match the status of the others.*

"I hope to see you to-morrow (Saturday), when

* *Natura Maligna.*

heaven knows if you may not have made it the best of the lot!"

"*Jan.* 30, 1881.

". . . I hope you think the sonnets read well in print. To-morrow I send Ellis the last MSS. of the volume." *

* * * * *

"*Feb.* 17, 1881.

". . . Just a line to remind you of our appointment for Saturday. I have done a Sonnet for *Found*, and 31 stanzas of the Scottish ballad, which is inevitably rather level work as yet. . . ."

* * * * *

"*Feb.* 28, 1881.

". . . I hope to see you Wednesday. The ballad is getting rapidly to a close, but I don't know whether I shall not stop for a few days. I wrote a good slice to-day. . . ."

* * * * *

The fine work done by Rossetti in these last years of his life would never have been accomplished but for Watts-Dunton's tactful and encouraging words. After what were at first but feeble attempts at sonnet-writing, Rossetti, whose thoughts were gradually taken off himself, improved in health, and so regained his former vital force of poetic production. As a proof of this there is that superb ballad, *The White Ship*, and a year later

* Messrs. Ellis and White published *Ballads and Sonnets* in 1881.

the scarcely less remarkable one, *The King's Tragedy*. Watts-Dunton often spoke of this ballad as Rossetti's "best performance." It was one in which he took intense interest. Originally it was inspired by the pictures from *The King's Quhair*, painted by W. B. Scott, at Penkill, and in a letter to Rossetti dated July 29, 1880, referring to this poem at the time the poet-painter was engaged upon it, William Bell Scott says: "The James the First of Scots subject is an admirable one. Have you a good account of the catastrophe? I have seen a full one, but can't recall where. There was a trap-door raised and he secreted himself below without avail." In speaking of this ballad, Walter Pater has said: "Perhaps if one had to name a single composition of Rossetti's to a reader who desires to make acquaintance with him for the first time, it is *The King's Tragedy* one would select—that poem so moving, so popularly dramatic and lifelike."

When Watts-Dunton was prevented from visiting Rossetti during that last year, letters came almost daily, and there is a certain special interest attached to some of them from the fact that they refer to the volume, *Ballads and Sonnets*, which the poet-painter was busily engaged upon with a view to immediate publication.

"*7 May*, 1881.

"My dear Watts,

"I am sending you more proofs just come. They are near the end now, and the book will bear

taking out a few things if desirable. I have marked queries as to omissions. Will you write me your view without delay, as I must be sending to printer by Monday early?

"Your affec.

"D. G. R."

* * * * *

"*May* 8, 1881.

"Both the letter and packet were posted on Friday night. With this I send you the final. I am omitting the two sonnets I asked you about and three more, but shall retain the *Chimes*, all but its first section.

"I am really much perplexed whether to restore that note in front of the *House of Life* or not. I have been sounding the beauty of yet another sonnet in the interests of this point. I should like a little talk with you about it if you were near and could come in. I want now to be winding up immediately." *

* * * * *

"*May* 10. 1881.

"I got to-day the whole of the *Bride's Prelude* in print. Must let you have it as soon as I can, but have not as yet a spare copy. This volume (the old one) will now be going on.† On reading the *Bride's Prelude* again in type, I think you will agree with me that its picturesqueness is sufficient to make it pass muster, though it has no other quality to recommend it. Be-

* *Ballads and Sonnets*, 1881. † *Poems*, 1870.

sides, I don't see how it can be spared, as the space must be filled. . . .

"I hope you may be able to dine with me on Wednesday, as I much want to be seeing you.

"You asked me about any special meaning in my mind connected with the name *Rose Mary*. The various reasons I gave must be summed up in the main one —it is a specially *virginal* name appropriate to the seeress of the Beryl.

"I am still fidgeting as to whether that note in front of *The House of Life* is *to be or not to be*." *

* * * * *

"16 *May* 1881.

"MY DEAR WATTS,

"I am wanting your advice about a point connected thus late with the Poems—not the *House of Life* question.†

"Could you dine with me on Tuesday? I should be very glad if you could, as time is getting short as to the printing. I may possibly have another favourable picture stroke to tell you of. I want also to discuss my best plans in case of a forced move.

"I have got *Sister Helen* in print with the addition. It reads well, I think. I hope I might be able to give you this and *Bride's Prelude* on Tuesday.

"Your affec.

"D. G. R."

* * * * *

* *Ballads and Sonnets*, 1881. † *Ballads and Sonnets.*

"*May* 21, 1881.

"My dear Watts,

"Would Wednesday next find you able to dine here? I hope so. When I see you I can hand you an entire first set of the volume, if you like. I should much like to know how you think *Bride's Prelude* reads in print.

"As to *King's Tragedy*, we went thoroughly into the chronicle at the time, and I thought we were both agreed that the change was desirable. Now the heat is off me, I don't know whether I could reconsider the print with a chance of equal success, but certainly *shall* give it some further consideration. I suppose I should have to rewrite 8 or 10 stanzas. This would matter nothing if they came as good as the first inspiration, but there would lie the doubt.*

"Yours ever,

"D. G. R."

* * * * *

"*May* 27, 1881.

"My dear Watts,

"I hope to see you to-morrow (Friday).

"The binders are most provoking about the cover of my book, and will not get the tint right. I am asking Ellis whether we had not better try another binder. William did find several small errors overlooked by me. All has now gone into the printers, who, however, have not yet sent proof with alteration in *King's Tragedy*.

* *Ballads and Sonnets*, 1881.

I daresay it will come before I see you. If not, I will make another copy of it to show you.

"Your affec.

"D. G. R."

* * * * *

Rossetti, never hesitating, as we have seen, to criticize lines in Watts-Dunton's sonnets, was eager to seek the opinion of his friend upon any lines in his own poems.

"I adopted the changes," he says (May 30, 1881), "but I think improved that at page 138 which reads—

"'"For *her* sake most!" I cried; and I marked
The pang that my words could wring.'

"Is *pang* or *throe* better? *Pang* certainly, I think, except for repeated *ng*.*

"I will hope much to be seeing you on Wednesday to dinner as arranged.

"If you should be seeing Ellis, I would like to know if he is communicating at all with the American firm who wrote to me for advanced sheets. I told him to act as he thought best, but I suppose they had better have them, as a 3/6 turns up now and then.

"I have just read *Otho the Great*. Really, faulty and mad-Elizabethan as it is, it affords perhaps the clearest proof of the quality of robustness left by Keats. One scene (the 1st of Act 4) is extremely fine in conception and clarity. It is curious that Chatterton and

* *The King's Tragedy* (*Ballads and Sonnets*, 1881).

Keats left each a Tragedy and a historical dramatic fragment."

* * * * *

Still busily engaged in correcting the proofs of his forthcoming volume, he writes :—

"*June*, 1881.

"My dear Watts,

"We made no appointment. What do you say to next Wednesday ?

"I enclose last amendments of ballad.* All is now ready for Press. I have apprised White of this. I send also the amended *Trafalgar* sonnet, though I think you have it.

"Your affec.

"D. G. R."

Then came the letter giving the amended form for the dedication of this book of poems to Watts-Dunton, which was approved and adopted.

"*Aug.* 1, 1881.

". . . As to the dedication, I don't think the *Muse* will do after all, and there is a slightly Hibernian tone. The following would be simpler :—

'To
Theodore Watts,
The friend whom my verses won for me,
these few more pages
are affectionately inscribed.'"

* *The King's Tragedy* (*Ballads and Sonnets*, 1881).

(iii.) *At Birchington-on-Sea.*

The days at Cheyne Walk were now fast drawing to a close.

Watts-Dunton had begun to realize in his talks with John Marshall that it was imperative for Rossetti to get change of air. It was suggested that Birchington-on-Sea was the most suitable place in many ways. It so chanced, moreover, that John Seddon * had been erecting a number of one-storied residences or bungalows in the neighbourhood, and the offer of one of these was accepted, the owner having generously offered it to Rossetti free of expense. The house was named Westcliff Bungalow, now known as Rossetti Bungalow, in the Rossetti Road. Mr. Hall Caine made the journey to Birchington with him, and was there all the time until the end. Watts-Dunton, however, although at that moment overwhelmed with literary and legal affairs, went down on frequent visits—visits which John Marshall affirmed prolonged Rossetti's life.

The effect upon Rossetti, indeed, of the mere presence of Watts-Dunton is pathetically illustrated in a few simple words quoted by Mr. William Rossetti from the diary which his mother kept at Birchington during Rossetti's very last days :—

* An intimate friend of Rossetti's, who afterwards designed the fountain that formed the base of the monument erected in Cheyne Walk in memory of the poet-painter.

"'March 28. Tuesday. Mr. Watts came down. Gabriel rallied marvellously.'

"This," says Mr. William Rossetti, "is the last cheerful item which it is allowed us to record concerning my brother; I am glad that it stands associated with the name of Theodore Watts."

The last visit was on the 7th April, Watts-Dunton having been urgently summoned to Rossetti's side by a telegram on the previous night from Mr. Hall Caine, which ran: "Come down to-morrow if you can, or to-night if possible; he is much worse."

"During his last illness at Birchington," says Watts-Dunton, "he recalled his former relations with friends with whom he had been intimate in former days, remembering them with all the old affection, and speaking of that Christmas gathering at Bognor when so many of his kindred met with the friends who loved them all. With those who really knew Rossetti, I have observed that in their reminiscences of famous men in the past, their note falls into a gentler key whenever touching upon the poet-painter."

At the moment of his death, Watts-Dunton was "at Rossetti's side partly supporting him," as recorded in a note in Mr. William Rossetti's diary, dated April 10, 1882.

"Watts is a hero of friendship," was one of the last expressions of gratitude that came from Rossetti's lips.

Watts-Dunton gave all the assistance in his power

with regard to the sales of Rossetti's household, decorative effects, and remaining works of art at 16 Cheyne Walk. Scores of sympathetic letters from friends came to him at the time of Rossetti's death. These letters expressed apprehension that Rossetti's loss must prove a heavy blow to him, and that it would be long before the void thus made could even partially be filled.

Rossetti continued to the last to paint, write poetry, and read novels. He was always a voracious novel reader, and his impression of that Victorian favourite, Miss Braddon, is given in a letter to Watts-Dunton from Birchington-on-Sea, February 22, 1882, a few weeks before his decease :—

"Your affectionate and amusing letter was most welcome. I hope it may be succeeded by another visit when practicable. As for my health, there has strictly been no relapse, as there has never been any improvement. It has been a steady decline throughout. But enough on this head.

"Visitors we have had none lately. I have taken refuge a good deal under the wing of Miss Braddon, whom I never read before. There is a charming fluctuation in her between *Vixen* and the more hollow and pretentious chaps of fiction. But, seriously, she is much better than I supposed. *Aurora Floyd* has many fine parts, and the two heroes, Mellish and Bulstrode, are true and well-contrasted characters, not savouring at all of the ultra-sensational, though some of the incidents

do so perhaps here and there. Still I think the book has excellent pretensions. I have since read two called *Birds of Prey* and *Charlotte's Inheritance*, forming one narrative. The second especially is a fine and touching story. I think with you that the authoress must be credited with some genius, as apart from mere talent; and I can see nothing that should be called vulgar in her books, though they sometimes stretch a point for effect. Besides this, she is always amusing. . . . My impression is that she has hardly met with a recognition as good in kind as she deserves."

Rossetti was at work upon *Proserpine* and *Joan of Arc* during the first days of March. His old ballad, *Jan Van Hunks*, was finished at the end of March, and two sonnets relevant to his design of the *Sphinx*, which he wrote on his death-bed on the 5th April, he presented to Watts-Dunton. Those two sonnets still remain unpublished, but the ballad, *Jan Van Hunks*, appeared in the *English Review*.

The theme of *Jan Van Hunks* is somewhat grim; it relates to a fatal smoking duel with the devil, who bears soul and body off to hell. And, strange to say, "Although," as Watts-Dunton has related, "he fully realized that his end was approaching, he enjoyed writing the ballad, for he frequently laughed over it while reading it to me, a few verses at a time, every evening."

The two sonnets have been printed for private circulation by Mr. T. J. Wise, and the original manu-

script of *Jan Van Hunks* (also printed by him for private circulation) is in his possession.

In January 1907, at the request of the editor, *Jan Van Hunks* appeared in the *English Review*. In a few introductory words Watts-Dunton says :—

"In another page of this Review will be found a poem by D. G. Rossetti never before published. . . . The poem has been in my possession ever since it was finished in 1882. Why has it been kept in abeyance so long ?

"In 1886 William Michael Rossetti published, in two volumes, the collected edition of his brother's works. In his preface he said :—

"'There are two poems by my brother, unpublished as yet, which I am unable to include among his collected works. One of these is a grotesque ballad about a Dutchman, begun at a very early date, and finished in his last illness. The other is a brace of sonnets, interesting in subject, and as being the very last thing he wrote. These works were presented as a gift of love and gratitude to a friend, with whom it remains to publish them at his own discretion.'

"Now it is well known that the friend alluded to is he to whom *Ballads and Sonnets* was inscribed.

"And it is equally well known that Rossetti gave these poems to me on his death-bed, to be included in a projected joint miscellany by him and me. Many causes have conspired to delay publication. In men-

tioning them I shall have to enter into details of a somewhat personal kind.

"I had promised Rossetti that I would write his biography, unless his brother, Mr. W. M. Rossetti, should undertake it. It was the special wish of the dear brother to whom Rossetti owed so much, and also of his sister Christina, that I should undertake the biography. Indeed, it was arranged that Mr. W. M. Rossetti and I should bring out two volumes, one consisting of a life of the poet, to be written by me, and the other consisting of the family letters, to be edited and annotated by Mr. W. M. Rossetti. But, as Mr. A. C. Benson, in his admirable monograph on Rossetti, says, 'There is such a thing as knowing a man too well to be his biographer.' I could not bring myself to the task. If I had done so, I should have produced the longest biography in the world, so burdened was I with reminiscences of him. After the lapse of several years the biography had to be written by his brother instead of me. My only consolation for having missed the opportunity of being Rossetti's biographer is that the work has been so admirably done by his brother. It is one of the sweetest, noblest things in our literature.

"After I abandoned the biography, another cause of delay in publishing the poem presented itself. I still cherished the hope of giving reminiscences of my intercourse with Rossetti at Herne Bay, at Kelmscott Manor, and at Bognor—places where Rossetti resided at various times, and where Mr. W. M. Rossetti did

not often go. In such reminiscences space could have been found for the introduction of the posthumous poems. Full as Mr. W. M. Rossetti's *Life* is, I feel that without an account of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sojourn in these three retreats the story would in a certain sense be imperfect."

In reference to Rossetti's poem, *Jan Van Hunks*, Watts-Dunton wrote to Mr. T. J. Wise at the time he was having it printed (August 3, 1909) for private circulation :—

" I want to trouble you to do me a service in regard to *Jan Van Hunks*. Years ago I got several proofs of the poem struck off, but never examined the proofs with the original. When I allowed the editor of the *English Review* to print the poem in his second number, I found to my dismay that he had edited it according to some theory of his own. I pointed out this in the *Athenæum*, but I forgot the facts when I parted with the manuscript to you. I ought to have retained that manuscript until I had examined it with a copy of the proofs. I shall shortly be publishing it in a collection of essays, with my essay upon it which appeared in the magazine. You are so very good-natured and kind that I will venture to ask you to get your secretary to examine the proof with the manuscript. This will really be doing me a great service."

X.

THE "ATHENÆUM."

X.

The "Athenæum."

WATTS-DUNTON joined the *Athenæum* staff in 1876, while he was still at Danes Inn, and his first article appeared on the 8th of July of that year.

Maccoll was a constant guest at the Danes Inn receptions. It was, no doubt, through their common friend, Thomas Purnell, that he and Maccoll came to be on intimate terms.

His method of writing his articles for the *Athenæum* —to say nothing of other work—was to start with notes scribbled in pencil at odd moments, usually in the early morning, absolutely undecipherable except by himself, and then rapidly dictate from these rough but suggestive notes his critique on the book or subject under discussion. And as in the case when writing a page of fiction, no page in his review articles ever satisfied him, and it was seldom until the eleventh hour, when forced by a letter from Maccoll—brief but peremptory—urging him to send off his copy or proof without another moment's delay, that the manuscript was reluctantly delivered into the hands of the "printer's devil-in-waiting."

He was constantly receiving letters from friends in

literary circles expressing appreciation of his attractive and brilliant essays. Sir Charles Dilke, the proprietor of the *Athenæum*, was one of his most enthusiastic admirers. In a letter dated April 24, 1877, he wrote: "Let me congratulate you on your wonderful article of last week, which has produced much talk." This was an article on Proctor of April 21, 1877. Watts-Dunton was, at this time, contributing nearly every week an essay of six or eight columns.

His review of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* is one of the most interesting experiences in connection with his critical work for the *Athenæum*. In a letter dated June 28, 1886, W. E. Henley, at that time on the most intimate terms with Stevenson, wrote to Watts-Dunton :—

"Stevenson's new book, *Kidnapped*, is published on the 1st July. It would give him the greatest pleasure to know that you would review it for the *Athenæum*. He would, I can tell you with assurance, rather read your blame than most men's praise, inasmuch as he knows that, if blame you must, he will thoroughly deserve it."

The critique of this famous novel certainly displays a decided gift on Watts-Dunton's part in fathoming Stevenson's design in his construction of the story.* Henley wrote to Watts-Dunton, in a letter dated October 19, 1886 :—

* The review appeared in the *Athenæum*, in Vol. II., 1886.

"I am just back from Paris, where—last Saturday—Louis and I read your article in a *voiture*, on the Boulevard des Italiens. I know not if he has written to you; I do know that you have pleased and interested him greatly. Your imagination thereby appealed to us both a good deal; what is more, your application of it to *Kidnapped* is, he tells me, strictly true. So, once again, you may be proud of having said exactly the right thing.

"As for myself, I am glad to have so far forced your hand as to have given you the opportunity for such a piece of capital criticism. . . ."

A few days later a long letter came from Stevenson—a letter which Watts-Dunton greatly appreciated.*

"I have just finished reading an unmistakable 'Theodore Watts' review in the *Athenæum*," William Sharp writes—"that on Traill's *Sterne*.† It seems to me an exceedingly important review, the remarks on the *humour of Man* being especially to the point. As to one who was 'at once a dyspeptic, a Calvinist, and a *Scotchman*'—I don't believe you English devils apprehend at all adequately the sad loving humour of Carlyle as well as his bitter irony. I am no Carlylean myself, but I feel his pathetic humour sometimes notwithstand-

* Vide *Theodore Watts-Dunton*, by James Douglas. (Hodder and Stoughton.)

† *Sterne* (English Men of Letters), by H. D. Traill. See review by Watts-Dunton in *Athenæum*, Vol. II., 1882.

ing. I *wish* you would collect a volume of essays of this kind!"

Traill's book, *The New Lucian*, is perhaps the most remarkable of his works (1884)—a series of Dialogues of the Dead which show brilliancy, scholarly irony, and humour. He was a delightful companion, and living at one time near The Pines, was a frequent visitor there.

In reference to his *Sterne*, the review by Watts-Dunton led to the meeting and intimacy between them.

At the time of the seventieth anniversary of the *Athenæum*, Mr. John C. Francis, one of Watts-Dunton's friends of more than thirty years' standing, wrote to him from Bream's Buildings, Chancery Lane, on December 7, 1897:—

"I am going to ask a great boon from you. The *Athenæum* will be seventy years old on the 1st of January, and we all want you to write for that number a retrospect of literature during the period covered by the *Athenæum*. I do hope you will give us the pleasure of doing this for us, for I so much want to make a speciality of our grand old paper's birthday, and in no way could we do it so well as by the article we suggest from yourself.

"I am sure, out of love for the paper we all regard with affection, that we shall have your most cordial assent.

"If we can send you any books or anything you may require, all shall of course be at your service."

Watts-Dunton, in reply, sent the desired contribution.*

To show how occupied he was at one period in writing for the *Athenæum* alone, it is only necessary to state that letters from the editor to him make it apparent that Watts-Dunton was writing almost in the same week a review of Rossetti's *Letters*, a critique on a volume of William Morris's poems, and one on Knapp's *Life of Borrow*.

It is quite obvious from this chronicle of Watts-Dunton's activities that he was a man of very wide interests and great versatility. To students of literature his name has long been familiar as a poet, novelist, and critic. Undoubtedly he was most ambitious of achieving distinction in the domain of poetry, and it was here that he considered himself to be best worthy of remembrance, while references to his critical writings in his later years would make him rather impatient. This is neither the place nor the time to examine critically Watts-Dunton's contribution to poetry. It is sufficient to say that, despite the warm praise of such distinguished friends as Rossetti, Swinburne, and Meredith, it seems unlikely posterity will endorse the poet's own view of his work.

In his heart we do not think he ever rated highly

* See *Athenæum*, dated January 1, 1898.

his romances, pleased though he was at the reception of *Aylwin*. Fiction-writing interested and amused him, but there is no evidence that he took it very seriously.

His romances have many admirers, but few, we surmise, would apply the word *great* to Watts-Dunton as a novelist. Yet there can be no question of Watts-Dunton's greatness in the field of critical literature. Here his real genius lay; here he found the readiest medium for his creative imagination. Since the coming of Coleridge, the old view of the critic that he is a man necessarily of a secondary order of mind has vanished. Every great critic admittedly used his creative faculty to interpret the world of other men in place of fashioning a world of his own; but to interpret luminously the work of genius argues a measure of genius in the interpreter. Therein lies the difference between the little critic and the great one. To the small man the art of criticism is the art of fault-finding; to the great critic it is the art of "spiritual discovery." He is not unmindful of the blemishes, but seeks to reveal and actualize the greatness through the blemishes.

Watts-Dunton never forgot this. Criticism to him was an act of sympathy. Perhaps a grain or so more salt, and a little less sugar, would have given greater cogency to some of his later criticism; but none knew better than he how easy and poor a thing is the rôle of the "smart slater."

As regards the criticism, this may be said at the outset, that he is at his best when the personal equation

of the writer criticized was not involved. In a large number of his *Athenæum* essays, loyalty to his many friends often blurred the sharp contour of his critical judgment. Not that he ever indulged in the "good, thick, strong, stupefying incense smoke" of mere adulation. He had too sensitive an artistic conscience, too keen a sense of responsibility, for that. And his strictures on Browning, Stevenson—both friends of his—clear him from that imputation. None the less, his friendships hampered him. Much of the discursiveness that diluted the critical flavour of the writing is due to the fact that even if he would not praise what he did not think worthy of praise, he would avoid points of criticism that might have given greater value to the article. Unless the matter seemed to him of vital importance, he preferred not to come to close grips with his subject. Then, again, his generous sympathy with the tribe of unknown writers struggling to make their way, reacted with disadvantage upon his critical acumen. Critical literature would have gained if he had had an infusion of Henley's brutal directness in his blood, and Henley something of his tenderness and consideration.

The more intimate articles—those, for instance, on Morris, Rossetti, Borrow—are rich in graphic touches of visualization. But even as studies in dramatic portraiture, they just fall short of greatness because of the very quality of which we have been speaking. They tell us at once too much and too little: too much for

a detached and objective criticism; too little for a really intimate, idiosyncratic study.

Where, however, the personal equation is not brought into play, his intellectual faculty moves freely and easily.

What are the main characteristics of his criticism? Stated briefly, they are these—allusiveness and subtlety. As an illustration of the former, take this passage from his criticism on Sterne already referred to:—

"Yorickism is, there is scarcely need to say, the very opposite of the humour of Swift. One recognizes that the universe is rich in things to laugh at and to love; the other recognizes that the universe is rich in things to laugh at and to hate. One recognizes that among these absurd things there is nothing else so absurd and (because so absurd) so lovable as a man; the other recognizes that there is nothing else so absurd and (because so absurd) so hateful as a man. The intellectual process is the same; the difference lies in the temperament—the temperament of Jaques and the temperament of Apemantus. And in regard to misanthropic ridicule it is difficult to say which fate is more terrible, Swift's or Carlyle's—that of the man whose heart must needs yearn towards a race which his piercing intellect bids him hate; or that of the man, religious, conscientious, and good, who would fain love his fellows and cannot. It is idle for men of this kind to try to work in the vein of Yorick. It needs the sweet temper of him who at

the 'Mermaid' kept the table in a roar, or of him who, in the words of the 'cadet of the house of Keppoch,' was 'sometimes called Tristram Shandy and sometimes Yorick, and very great favourite of the gentlemen.' Sterne, like Jaques and Hamlet, deals with 'the irony of human intercourse,' but what he specially recognizes is a deeper irony still—the irony of man's intercourse with himself and with nature, the irony of the intercourse between man the spiritual being and man the physical being—the irony, in short, of man's position amid these natural conditions of life and death. It is in the apprehension of this anomaly—a spiritual nature enclosed in a physical nature—that Sterne's strength lies."

Note the writer's method: he envisages his subject with other masterpieces in order to distinguish its relative value. He glances back with dexterous lucidity over the great humorists of the last few centuries, and in so doing gives a distinctive shape to the comic spirits of each. This particular instance, therefore, is exhibited on a background of luminous exegesis, which has enabled the reader not only to detach and appreciate the particular shade of Sterne's humour, but has helped him to apprehend more thoroughly that most intricate of critical problems, the basic constituents of humour itself.

The ingenuity with which Watts-Dunton displays his allusive powers is well indicated in his essay on

Captain Singleton. The article is a sound piece of Defoe criticism, though weakened in its totality by the writer's deliberate discursiveness. Yet this very discursiveness arises largely from the allusive aptitude of the critic—an aptitude that is responsible alike for his peculiar strength and his peculiar weakness as a critic.

In its general effect, the critique *quâ* critique is inferior to such penetrating and balanced work as Leslie Stephen's essay on Defoe in *Hours in a Library;* and as a picture of the man it is weaker and less vital than the vigorous portrait more recently drawn by Mr. John Masefield. But viewed in part, and not as a whole, it contains some admirable passages. The best, perhaps, is his elaborate comment on Carlyle's remarks :—

" Carlyle, when he said that ' Homer surpasses all men in clearness of sight, but, strangely enough, at no great distance below him are Richardson and Defoe,' showed, as he often showed, that though the most brilliant *littérateur* of his time, he was not a critic in the deeper sense of that word ; for it is not to *raconteurs* like Defoe that we turn for the Homeric ' clearness of sight,' but to Shakespeare, Cervantes, Sterne, and Scott—to the dramatists, in a word. The difference between the imaginative belief to which the writer of the *Odyssey* appeals, and the imaginative belief appealed to by *Robinson Crusoe*, is, indeed, one of kind. Very largely in the *Odyssey*, and entirely in *Robinson Crusoe*, the *vis matrix* of the story is man's shifts and devices in his

struggle with the forces of nature. This is no doubt true; but while in the one case nature is conquered by individual character, in the other she is conquered by the instinctive and inevitable ingenuities of universal man. And herein lies the difference between the born dramatist and the born story-teller.

"In Homer's case it was only from artistic environment—it was only because in Homer's time there was no stage—that so pure a dramatist as he worked in any other than purely dramatic forms. Wonderful it is, no doubt, that ages before Phrynichus, ages before an acted drama was dreamed of, a dramatic poet of the first order should arise who, though he was obliged to express his splendid dramatic imagination through epic forms, expressed it almost as fully as if he had inherited the method and the stage of Sophocles; but so it was. Only on the rarest occasions (such as in *Iliad*, v. 158, and *Iliad*, iii. 243–44) does he leave the dramatic action to tell us what is going on outside the dramatic field.

"Now the very opposite kind of genius is that of Defoe. So, at least, it seems to us. If there is a form of narrative where for the narrator to leave the dramatic field is to destroy the illusion, it is, of course, the autobiographic form, where the narrator is the eye-witness of everything. But Defoe in *Captain Singleton* never hesitates to do this. For instance, in chap. ii. Singleton gives an account of what passed on shipboard while he was himself away on land. Another instance occurs in chap. xiii., where Quaker William, in consequence of

a dream 'between Mangahelly and another point called Cape St. Sebastian,' meets with certain remarkable adventures there while Singleton remains on the ship. Singleton here, as in the former instance, passes at once from the attitude of the eye-witness to the attitude of the chronicler, and tells the story of William's adventures by the historical method. Nor was there any structural need for him to do this; he could have done as Homer always does in such cases—he could have waited for William's return, and then have given us the story of these adventures through William's mouth, and thus have intensified their effect a hundredfold. The truth is that Lamb, when he said that 'to read him is like reading evidence in a court of justice,' said a far truer thing about Defoe than did Carlyle when he compared Defoe's clearness of sight with Homer's, though even the method of the 'court of justice' is weakened if, as in *Captain Singleton*, the secondary evidence of 'hearsay' is on occasion substituted for the primary evidence of the eyesight witness." *

The allusive wealth of Watts-Dunton's critical writing carries with it obviously a few disadvantages. The range of his allusions, the impressionability of his imagination, lead him into discursive byways, preju-

* His preface to the World's Classics edition of *Captain Singleton*, recently published, is to some extent based on his article on Defoe in the *Athenæum*, which appeared twenty-nine years ago (October 8, 1887).

dicial often to the intellectual perspective. He sees with genuine insight into all the ramifications of his subject; but he forgets at times that, in presenting the results of his insight to the ordinary reader, the panoramic nature of his vision may dazzle rather than impress if he lingers unduly on some of the subsidiary points. His gift for presentment is panoramic rather than stereoscopic. But he is a delightful wanderer, and takes one at times into byways that undoubtedly help us to understand the lie of the country.

To pass to the second characteristic :—

A good example of his fine subtlety may be found in his essay on *The Truth about Rossetti*, where he says: "His genius, both in poetry and painting, was the very culmination and most perfect flower of the romantic temper which is mystic without being metaphysical." The suggestive value of the distinction is even more apparent when taken in connection with a passage that appears earlier in the essay: "To eliminate asceticism from romantic art, and yet to remain romantic, to retain that mysticism which alone can give life to romantic art, and yet to be as sensuous as the Titians who revived sensuousness at the sacrifice of mysticism, was the quest, more or less conscious, of Rossetti's genius."

The famous essay on *The Renascence of Wonder*, first published in *Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature* (Vol. III.), abounds in the most delicate nuances of critical insight. Too much perhaps has been made of the phrase which gives its title to the article,

which, though a striking and effective one, is by no means one of his happiest distinctions. However, it serves its purpose well if only by drawing attention to the subtle wisdom of the writer's survey.

A later illustration of Watts-Dunton's subtlety as a critic may be found in his review of *Kidnapped; à propos* of Stevenson's art he discusses the distinction between an imaginative and an inventive poet :—

"Perhaps, however, could we pursue the subject here, we should find the most remarkable instance of the difference between an imaginative and an inventive poet to be furnished by the cases of Shakespeare and Spenser. But we are concerned at the present moment with prose fiction alone, and Charlotte Brontë affords us an example of a writer in whom the imaginative faculty was very great, but whose inventive faculty scarcely existed at all. After *The Professor* was rejected on account of deficiency of plot-interest, she set to work to construct a plot of the sensational kind, and gave us the ugly old situation of a maniac hidden away in a country house. The entire plot showing how the Lowood governess narrowly escaped committing bigamy with her 'master,' whose mad wife was secretly imprisoned at Fieldhead, was as poor and banal as that of any of those 'shilling dreadfuls' that add to the horrors of the railway stations, and seem just now to threaten the very existence of prose fiction. And yet *Jane Eyre* stands at the top of English romances for

sheer imaginative strength; on the other hand, a writer like the author of *Called Back*, while showing a very considerable power of invention, seems to have been absolutely without the imaginative faculty." *

We will conclude this brief glance at Watts-Dunton's critical work with a suggestive passage taken from an article on *Songs of the Great Dominion*.† It happily exemplifies the seminal power of Watts-Dunton's romantic imagination, and should prove of special interest to all concerned in the rapidly increasing literature of "our brethren across the seas."

"What Wordsworth tried all his life to do, the poets of Canada, of the Australias, of the Cape, have the opportunity of doing. Apart from the aid of environment, they have on their side the mysterious power of race. The power to drop all bygones in confronting Nature—nay, even the desire to do so—seems to be possessed by only one of the races of Europe. And what race is this? It is our own—the race in which the old Scandinavian passion for the sea and the old Teutonic passion for the wild-wood are combined. And yet between the passion for the wild-wood shown by our Teutonic ancestors and the modern feeling shown by our Canadian and Australian brothers there is this difference: to the Teuton the wild-wood

* *Athenæum*, Vol. II., 1886.

† An anthology edited by W. D. Lighthall (1889).

was a sure friend to fall back upon in the hour of need from all attacks of enemies, even as to the Scandinavian was the sea; but also it was backed by dark depths of unexplored mystery which appalled his soul. If it was the haunt of the gods, it was also the haunt of dreadful powers stronger than the gods themselves. It was only at the edge of the wild-wood, with the clear lawns in view, that the Teutonic songster, like the nightingale at the forest's edge, felt his spirits rise to actual singing point. But now that the wild-wood is cleared of gods and demons alike—now that science has brought man upon an equality of power with Nature—the temper of the Canadian singer is that of hope—almost of exultation. It is the truth, no doubt, that there has been during late years a growth of the high spirits of Canadian poetry, as such early anthologies as that of Dr. Dewart show. We do not, however, attribute it, with Mr. Lighthall, to the Confederation, splendid as that great event was, but rather to the exhilaration that comes to men in a brilliant climate, who are day by day possessing themselves of Nature's secrets and her wealth. Those forests of fire which, as Mr. Lighthall says, 'hide daylight at noonday,' had a very different effect upon the imaginations of the earlier settlers from the effect they have upon the imagination of men who are piercing them at their will with nineteenth-century daylight. . . .

"How many a home-bound Englishman reading in this volume must yearn for the opportunity now

offered by the Canadian Pacific Railway of seeing the great virgin forests and prairies before settlement has fairly begun—of seeing them as they existed before even the foot of the red man tried them—of seeing them without that physical toil which only a few hardy explorers can undergo. It is hard to think that he who has not seen the vast unsettled tracts of the British Empire knows Nature only under the same aspect as she has been known by all the poets from Homer to our own day." *

Our great modern critics may be divided, roughly, into two classes: those who excel in acuteness and those who excel in subtlety. Hazlitt and Matthew Arnold belong to the former, De Quincey and Watts-Dunton to the latter.

In the quality of his critical genius, then, Watts-Dunton is nearer to De Quincey than to any other writer—with much of the same wealth of allusiveness, keen logical power, curious and extensive knowledge; and with the same tendency to lose himself in his subject at times in labyrinthine ways.

At his best he is delicately discriminative, and we feel the presence of a prismatic and decorative imagination rather than of a powerful, prehensile one.

* *Athenæum*, September 28, 1889.

XI.

"POETRY" AND "THE RENASCENCE OF WONDER."

XI.

"Poetry" and "The Renascence of Wonder."

IT has been shown that for twenty years or more, while engaged in legal, social, and journalistic pursuits, Watts-Dunton was giving leisure hours—"spare moments" would better express it—to the writing of *Aylwin* and *The Coming of Love*. But throughout all these activities he devoted much thought to the principles of poetic art. This was apparent in his talk as well as in his *Athenæum* essays. And when the time came for writing *Poetry* for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and at a later date his Introduction to the third volume of *Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature* (known as *The Renascence of Wonder*), he was brilliantly equipped for both tasks.

At St. Ives, early in his student days indeed, Watts-Dunton conceived the idea of writing a History of Poetry. It was from first to last his principal ambition while writing his essay, *Poetry*, in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and his essay, *The Renascence of Wonder*, in *Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature*, to incorporate with those two essays excerpts from many of his numerous fugitive articles on poetic criticism. He remarked to a

friend while arranging these two essays for publication in book form, "I shall achieve my greatest aim in life after all." * The History of Poetry, he thought, would now be completed and given to the world. And this aspiration might have been attained had he lived a year or two longer. During his last days his heart and soul were in the work, and the scheme of enlarging the *Poetry* essay was nearing completion when he died.

The story of the writing of that essay for the *Encyclopædia Britannica* can be related in a few words. In 1884, when Watts-Dunton was first approached by Professor Baynes on the subject, no man of letters at the time could have been selected as better equipped for the task. For some thirty years the History of Poetry had been incubating in his active and fertile brain, and never was he more ready than at this moment to give it birth. He had been introduced by Minto in the *Examiner* days to Robertson Smith and Spencer Baynes. No two men knew better than Smith and Minto did how thoroughly Watts-Dunton was qualified to undertake the work of writing the treatise on Poetry for the *Encyclopædia*. But a History of Poetry was, of course, out of the question. The treatise must be a comparatively brief essay on the principles of poetic art in relation to all other arts, as exemplified by the poetry of all the great literatures. And so it came about that the choice fell upon Watts-Dunton.

The essay on Poetry first appeared in the ninth

* *Poetry and The Renascence of Wonder.* (Herbert Jenkins, 1916.)

edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*; and in addition to this article Watts-Dunton wrote for that edition the articles *Sonnet*, *Wycherley*, *Vanbrugh*, *Rossetti*, *Etheredge*.*

In December 1888 Watts-Dunton was one of the guests at the Celebration Banquet in the Hall at Christ's College, Cambridge, under the presidency of the editor of the *Encyclopædia*, W. Robertson Smith. At his invitation a distinguished company of literary and scientific men assembled there to celebrate the completion of this important edition. Of those present among the famous men representing some branch of science or literature were Professor Darwin, Sir Frederick Abel, and Dr. John Murray. Watts-Dunton was also invited to attend the dinner given to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* staff when the eleventh edition was issued; but for certain reasons he declined the invitation in the following characteristic letter:—

"The Pines, Putney Hill, S.W.
"3 *November* 1902.

"Dear Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace,

"I am sorry to say that I am prevented from accepting your kind invitation for the 21st inst. The recollection of the delightful dinner that I attended at Cambridge, when the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was completed, adds to my regret.

"I cannot, however, let slip this opportunity, which

* For list of Watts-Dunton's articles in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *vide* Appendix.

may never occur again, of congratulating you and your colleagues upon the masterly way in which the supplement is being written and edited. Many a conversation I had, in the old days, with my dead friends who edited the ninth edition—Spencer Baynes and Robertson Smith—upon the enormous difficulties of editing that lofty work. Robertson Smith used to say in that quiet, humorous way of his, that to edit satisfactorily a large Encyclopædia required almost as happy a combination of the two opposite forces of the human mind—practical ability and speculative ability—as were needed to marshal an army and lead it into action. The practical side, he said, was exercised in finding the proper writers and dealing with their contributions without treading upon the authorial toe—the most sensitive kind of toe, he said, in the entire animal kingdom. The speculative ability was exercised in throwing the imagination forward to the far-off day when the last volume of the work should leave the binders.

"Remembering these words of his, I must confess that when I learnt that a supplement to the *Encyclopædia* was to be issued, taking up the thousand and one subjects that have arisen since those days, I trembled for you. To bring out a work that should be at once a new Encyclopædia and a supplement to an existing one—a work whose articles should not only be up to date themselves, but shed, as it were, a new light upon the old ones—seemed to me a daring project. But it has succeeded.

"As a pretty copious contributor to the ninth edition, and a very slight contributor to the supplement, I feel at liberty to say freely that the supplement seems to me much more than a worthy continuation of the book; it is also a new Encyclopædia in itself, and in some respects superior to the parent work. Fuller of original research and ripe scholarship than the parent work it could scarcely be, but it seems to me more skilfully methodized. In a word, as a working man of letters I already feel so indebted to this supplement that I cannot resist the impulse to send you these thanks of mine.

"Pray excuse this typewritten letter, but I dictate everything.

"Believe me to be,

"Yours very sincerely,

"THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON."

The article *Poetry* having been originally part of a treatise on the Romantic movement, or, more strictly speaking, part of the projected History of Poetry, it naturally occurred to Watts-Dunton to include his essay, *The Renascence of Wonder*, when he had finally decided upon shaping the mass of material—the work of fifty years—for issue in book form. Dr. Patrick, the editor of *Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature*, had invited him to write an introduction to the third volume of this publication, and he naturally chose the "Romantic movement" as the subject for his essay. In

a letter dated The Pines, March 4, 1902, Watts-Dunton wrote expressing his willingness to "contribute an essay dealing with the marvellous change that came over our literature from the dawn of the romantic movement, or, as I have christened it, 'The Renascence of Wonder,' which came to full fruition in the early years of the nineteenth century." In reply to this letter Dr. Patrick wrote confirming the arrangement with regard to this literary scheme, and it was agreed that the essay should be sent in before the end of May. Dr. Patrick was kept waiting, however, for the manuscript for nearly a year.

In addition to *The Renascence of Wonder* (indicating "a great revival movement of the soul of man, after a long period of prosaic acceptance in all things, including literature and art"), Watts-Dunton contributed to *Chambers's Encyclopædia* the article *Sonnet* —an essential part of the plan of the *Poetry and The Renascence of Wonder* volume.

That letters to him from the editor, full of "reminders" about "waiting for copy," were frequently received by Watts-Dunton, goes without saying. Every editor with whom he had any dealings could tell the same story. In a letter dated from Edinburgh, March 23, 1892, while Watts-Dunton was engaged on the *Sonnet* essay, the patient editor writes: "There is a yawning chasm of three columns awaiting your article."

Watts-Dunton also contributed to *Chambers's Cyclo-*

pædia of English Literature articles on *Byron* and *George Borrow*. An essay previous in date to these studies of the Romantic revival may be found in his Preface to *Chatterton* in Ward's English Poets (1881–83). T. H. Ward, while expressing his appreciation of this essay, admitted that he had views on the subject of Chatterton which did not entirely coincide with those of his friend; but he was well known for his broad-mindedness in dealing with his contributors.

Watts-Dunton's deep insight into the springs of the Romantic revival is nowhere better illustrated than in this remarkable essay. Some of the points emphasized are (according to his usual custom) repeated and emphasized in his article on *The Renascence of Wonder*; but the significance of Chatterton is far more fully developed in his earlier article.

"As to the romantic spirit, it would be difficult to name any one of his successors in whom the high temper of romance has shown so intense a life. . . . Coleridge, when *Christabel* was published in 1816, speaks of the anapæstic dance with which he varies the iambic lines, as being 'founded on a new principle'; and he has been much praised, and very justly, for such effects as this :—

> "'And Christabel saw the lady's eye,
> And nothing else saw she thereby,
> Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,
> Which hung in a murky old niche in the wall.'

"That this 'new principle' was known to Chat-

terton is seen in the following extract, which has exactly the *Christabel* ring—the ring which Scott only half caught and which Byron failed to really catch at all.

> "'But when he threwe downe his asenglave
> Next came in Syr Botelier bold and brave,
> The dethe of manie a Saraceen,
> Theie thought him a devil from Hell's black den,
> Ne thinking that anie of mortalle menne
> Could send so manie to the grave.
> For his life to John Rumsee he renders his thanks,
> Descended from Godred the King of the Manks.'

"With regard to the octosyllabics with anapæstic variations, it may be said no doubt that some of the miracle-plays (such as *The Fall of Man*) are composed in this movement, as is also one of the months in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar;* but the irregularity in these is, like that of the Border ballads, mostly the irregularity of makeshift, while Chatterton's *Unknown Knight*, like *Christabel*, and Goethe's *Erl King*, has several variations introduced (as Coleridge says of his own) 'in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion.' The 'new principle,' in short, was Chatterton's.

"Again, in the mysterious suggestiveness of remote geographical names—a suggestiveness quite other than the pomp and sonority which Marlowe and Milton so loved—the world-involving echoes of *Kubla Khan* seem to have been caught from such lines as these in Chatterton's African eclogue, *Narva and Mored*:—

> " 'From Lorbar's cave to where the nations end . . .
> Explores the palaces on Lira's coast,
> Where howls the war-song of the chieftain's ghost . . .
> Like the loud echoes on Toddida's sea,
> The warrior's circle, the mysterious tree.'

" And turning to the question of Chatterton's influence upon Keats, it is not only indirectly through Coleridge that the rich mind of Keats shows signs of having drunk at Chatterton's fountain of romance: there is a side of Chatterton which Keats knew and which Coleridge did not.

" It is difficult to express in words wherein lies the entirely spiritual kinship between Chatterton's *Ballad of Charity* and Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes*, yet I should be sceptical as to the insight of any critic who should fail to recognize that kinship. Not only are the beggar and the thunderstorm depicted with the sensuous sympathy and melodious insistence which is the great charm of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, but the movement of the lines is often the same. Take, for instance, the description of Keats's bedesman, 'meagre, barefoot, wan,' which is, in point of metrical movement, identical with Chatterton's description of the alms-craver, 'withered, forwynd, dead.'

" More obvious perhaps, yet not more essentially true, is the likeness between the famous passage in Keats's *Isabella*, beginning—

> " 'For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
> And went all naked to the hungry shark,' etc.,

and these four lines in Chatterton's *Narva and Mored*—

> " 'Where the pale children of the feeble sun
> In search of gold through every climate run,
> From burning heat to freezing torments go,
> And live in all vicissitudes of woe.'

" It was perfectly fit, therefore, that Keats should dedicate his *Endymion* to the memory of Thomas Chatterton. Not that Keats or Coleridge stole from Chatterton: no two poets had less need to steal from any one. But the whole history of poetry shows that poetic methods are a growth as well as an inspiration." *

It is arguable that Watts-Dunton has overestimated the work of Chatterton; but he presents a finely reasoned case, full of those subtle allusive touches that illuminate his best criticism.

The whole essay deserves the closest attention of the literary student; it is a notable contribution to poetical exegesis, and it is written with a splendid clarity and cogency.

While he was engaged on this essay on Chatterton, Rossetti took a lively interest in its progress.

" I am glad you are to do Chatterton, in whom I am getting well up," he writes on May 5, 1880. " He was a glorious creature! I send you the three pieces, one in antique spelling. I doubt whether the notes at pp. 2 and 4 of the *Minstrel's Marriage Day* may not be unnecessary and intrusive.

* Essay on *Chatterton* (Ward's English Poets).

"I suppose you would not think it desirable to specify to whom exactly Chatterton attributes the various pieces, *viz.* :—

"*Ballad of Charity* . . .	Thomas Rowley.
Third Eclogue	
Minstrel's Song . . .	
Wedding Ballad . . .	Sir Thybbot Gorges.
W. Canyuge's Feast . .	W. Canyuge.

"I fancy all ought now to be put in print to see what space remains.

"I'll hope to see you towards close of week. Please do name beforehand either Friday, Saturday or Sunday, that I may know *which*."

Again, in a letter to Watts-Dunton (May 17, 1880), Rossetti writes: "When I see you, more of Chatterton." And then a few days later: "I hope to see you to-morrow. Your excellent summary of Chatterton to hand. I have noted a slight point or two. I judge you have forgotten something to add as to his works, etc." And then again: "I daresay you mean to look in soon. What do you say to Wednesday? If you like to bring me the Chatterton work, I will see to it."

The two friends were never tired, indeed, of discussing the subject of the English Romantic school from its first inception with Chatterton, and the publication of the Percy ballads, "which aim not merely at the

revival of natural language," but seek rather to reach, through art and the forgotten world of old romance, that world of wonder and mystery and spiritual beauty of which poets gain glimpses through—

> " Magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

One of Watts-Dunton's favourite observations when referring to the subject of the renascence of wonder was that " the child's temper of wonder is the only true temper in which to look out upon the universe."

Before leaving Watts-Dunton's work in the *Cyclopædia of English Literature*, special mention must be made of his essay on Byron, which has rarely received its due meed of praise.

It seems to us a singularly just and discerning estimate of this much-discussed poet, midway between the depreciating violence of Landor on the one hand and the excessive panegyric of Matthew Arnold on the other. It is impossible to say that Watts-Dunton is not alive to Byron's crudities and lapses as a poet, for not a single defect escapes his keen discernment. At the same time he seems to seize on precisely those parts in Byron's genius that are the real source of his charm and attraction.

Nowhere is this better seen than in the luminous criticism of *Don Juan*.

Seizing on Byron's indebtedness to that clever jingler, Frere, he says :—

"It would be hard to exaggerate the splendour and triumph of *Don Juan*. And here we touch upon the very core of Byron's poetic work. The mere fact that almost all the best portion of that work is written in *ottava rima*, the stanza which especially lends itself to the use of a diction common to verse and prose, is alone sufficient to indicate his place among poets. Every stanzaic arrangement of lines, as has been said in discussing *Childe Harold*, has its metrical meaning, the instinctive understanding of which is necessary to every poet who works in it. Although Fairfax and Keats and others have used the *ottava rima* for entirely serious poetry, its metrical motive is what may be called jauntiness, and this makes it very specially adapted for worldly verse like *Beppo*, *Don Juan*, and the *Vision of Judgment*. This jauntiness is properly expressed by the fifth and sixth lines of *ottava rima*, which mock, so to speak, the metrical meaning of the previous quatrain. Frere, in *Whistlecraft*, could by mastery over double rhymes achieve the jaunty. But although a recognition of difficulty overcome is undoubtedly an element of the pleasure we derive from the *ottava rima*, it is far from being the most important element. The supreme charm of jauntiness in the *ottava rima* is seen when, and when only, it shows, as in Byron, that the really precious things of poetry, wit and wisdom, which to any other poet would be a burden, this poet in the very playfulness of his strength can carry jauntily. For, to show that the poet can do playfully all that the heroic

does seriously is the work of the serio-comic *ottava rima*—Italian or English. The reader should feel that here is one who could scale Parnassus if he would, but that in the riot of his power he lingers to disport himself on its lower slopes. But then it is essential to have the power before you can play with it. Here is the difficulty; and now it is that we come to the secret why the serio-comic *ottava rima* is not to be achieved by the mere word-kneader, knead he never so wisely. It is not born of artifice at all; it is the natural expression of a mood—the mood of the full-blooded man who has lived. It is true enough that *Whistlecraft* inspired *Beppo*—in writing which poem Byron at once found his feet. The author of *Whistlecraft* was wiped out of existence by the genius of his imitator; for *Whistlecraft* was inspired by jauntiness and clever rhyme-manipulation only. Now, although the *ottava rima* is the natural medium of jauntiness, that quality is just as much an impertinence in *ottava rima* as it is in any other measure, and as it is in real life, unless the poet makes jauntiness a good weight-carrier, as Byron does in his superb satirical poems in this measure. The same horse whose prancings in his box, unburdened by saddle or rider, seem so clumsy and ridiculous, looks a very different creature when he caracoles with ten stone upon his back." *

* *Vide* article *Byron*, in *Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature*, Vol. III.

XII.

"THE COMING OF LOVE."

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"The Coming of Love."

MEANWHILE, in the writing of reviews for the *Athenæum* and essays on poetic subjects for other periodicals there was no cessation. On the contrary, Watts-Dunton's output in journalistic work increased. Notwithstanding this fact, he continued at intervals to take from a drawer the manuscript of *Aylwin* and add a new chapter to the story, or revise or delete an old one; or, if in a poetic mood, compose a gypsy sonnet for future use in *The Coming of Love*. He began to be talked about more widely, though still preserving his anonymity. Indeed, the signature "Theodore Watts" at the end of his articles in the *Athenæum* would have been to readers of any discernment entirely superfluous; the writer's style was recognized at a glance.

In literary circles he was widely known. Letters poured in at The Pines from literary strangers no less than from literary friends, although, as is ever the case, no few of these epistles were accompanied by presentation copies of books from all sorts and conditions of writing men, appealing for some recognition of their

merit (if the critic could discern any) in the "columns of the leading literary journal."

Of course, it is needless to say that most of these letters were passed over without heed, for to respond was often impossible. He soon realized, indeed, as time went on, that the penalty of fame was beginning to be enforced, and that this recognized position of "leading critic on a leading literary journal" was not altogether an enviable one. He realized also that in the profession of letters, in this country at least, there exists more egotism and, what is even less agreeable, more pettiness of mind than in any other profession, and on many occasions a diplomatic faculty, of which he was by no means devoid, had to be exercised; for not infrequently he was more than suspected of writing adverse critiques on authors whose books he never even heard of until his attention was called to them. This fact led him to imagine that he was making enemies, and he would confidingly admit to his friends that when he began to publish fair treatment would not fall to his lot at the hands of the reviewers.

That this surmise was pure delusion on his part has since been proved beyond all question. Few authors have ever met with a friendlier reception. The number of detailed criticisms of *The Coming of Love*, no less than of *Aylwin*, when these two books appeared, was unusually numerous, not only in this country and in the colonies, but in America and even on the Continent. Still, there is little cause to doubt that this sensitivity

to criticism was one reason why Watts-Dunton hesitated so long in consenting to face the ordeal by publication. Would that he had profited by the example set him by Coleridge, whose intense abstraction from passing events enabled him to take no thought of "the shriek of the press-gang," to quote Swinburne's characteristic phrase.

It was not until the autumn of 1897 that Watts-Dunton's volume of poems, *The Coming of Love*,* saw the light. The chance given to him of having the book printed at the Kelmscott Press had been lost, like many other chances in his career, through his abiding weakness for "putting off" any decision. In his preface to *The Coming of Love* he has touched upon the subject of his procrastination with a sense of regret almost amounting to chagrin; for he says:—

"Had it not been for the intervention of matters of a peculiarly absorbing kind—matters which caused me to delay the task of collecting the verses—I should have been the most favoured man who ever brought out a volume of poems, for they would have been printed by William Morris at the Kelmscott Press. As that projected edition was largely subscribed for, a word of explanation to the subscriber is, I am told, required from me.

"Among the friends who saw much of that great poet and beloved man during the last year of his life,

* John Lane (The Bodley Head).

there was one who would not and could not believe that he would die—myself. To me he seemed human vitality concentrated to a point of quenchless light; and when the appalling truth that he must die at last struck through me, I had no heart and no patience to think about anything in connection with him but the loss that was to come upon us. And, now, whatsoever pleasure I may feel at seeing my verses in one of Mr. Lane's inviting little volumes will be dimmed and marred by the thought that Morris' name also might have been, and is not, on the imprint."

One reason which he gave for the delay in the publication of *The Coming of Love* was that "certain portions of the poem, one called *Gypsy Heather* and another the *Haymaking Song*, had been lent and lost." And yet these two poems, when at last found and incorporated in *The Coming of Love*, did not change its motive, but, as the author has himself admitted in his introduction to the seventh edition, "merely strengthened its colour and completed its symmetry."

The Kelmscott edition (limited to two hundred copies) was to have been printed by William Morris in 1894, at two guineas, and to appear simultaneously with the "ordinary edition," as Mr. John Lane's publication was to be called. No poet ever had a better opportunity of "waking up famous." Many letters came to Watts-Dunton from intimate friends expressing regret that he should have missed so good a prospect.

The critics showed, on the whole, great appreciation of the volume. In a letter to a friend, dated from The Pines, April 1, 1898, Watts-Dunton says: "The press has been so kind to my little volume of verse, *The Coming of Love*, that I should be ungrateful indeed if I found fault with my critics. Yet it is only the review of the book in the *Speaker* of last Sunday that has deeply touched me, for that is the only one which shows on the part of the critic a full apprehension of the circumstances under which the poems were written and the circumstances under which they have at this late hour been given to the public. All, or most, of the other critics seem to assume, because my verses have appeared in book form after long labours as a critic of poetry, that they are, in some strange way, the result of those labours! My 'personal' friends, of course, knew that I expressed myself as a poet many years before I wrote a line of prose; but then my old friends (a rapidly narrowing circle, alas!) are not reviewers. Your critic has been able to see the true state of the case. It was my verses (in manuscript then) that won me the friendship of the men I loved, and I am content to be overshadowed by such men and such poets as they."

The letters received from friends to whom he sent presentation copies of his volume of poems would fill many pages of this biography.

When Watts-Dunton sent George Meredith a copy of *The Coming of Love*, he wrote from Box Hill:—

"A lover of poetry cannot get such a volume as yours without some outcry, and you may as well hear that I am in love with Rhona, not the only one in that. The *Petrel* Introduction, beautiful in itself, is admirably fitted to present her. When I read her love-letter in the *Athenæum*, I had the regret that the dialect might cause its banishment by literature. Reading the whole poem, I see that it is as good as salt to a plate. We are the richer for it, and that is a rare thing to say of any poem now printed. The sonnets are mostly my familiars. I will not speak of the *tours de force*, except to express a bit of astonishment at the dexterity which can perform them without immolating the tender spirit of the work. I wish I had strength to pay you a visit at The Pines, and see Swinburne. Please assure him of my constant love. I have just completed three Odes—*The Revolution*, *Napoléon*, *Alsace-Lorraine*—and feel for the moment empty."

Among the reviewers of *The Coming of Love*, Watts-Dunton was vastly amused when, chancing upon a critique of the book in a Dutch journal, he read the following among other remarkable observations: "I vaguely remember another poem which finishes with a line somewhat like this: 'When Mother Carey takes her chickens out to sea.' Is it possible I read it in Kipling? I kindly request those who know the poem to let me know."

Watts-Dunton took a lively interest in the open-air

plays organized by Lady Archibald Campbell at her beautiful place in Surrey, known as Coombe Farm, on more than one occasion. An epilogue for the open-air performance of Banville's *La Baisée*, in which Lady Archibald Campbell took the part of " Pierrot," is included among the miscellaneous poems in *The Coming of Love*. Many of these " Miscellaneous Poems " are so reminiscent that they might almost be called autobiographical, with their pathetic tributes to friends whom he had lost. It would seem as though, when writing some of these sonnets, he were " looking down an Appian Way—a street of tombs—the tombs of those he loved," as he expressed it in his Preface to *Aylwin* a year after the book of poems was published. The sonnets to Christina Rossetti, *The Two Christmastides*, recalling the visits to Bognor, are perhaps the most reminiscent, as they are beyond doubt the most touching poems he ever wrote.

Stedman, the American critic, has said of Watts-Dunton " that his touch is quite independent of any bias derived from the eminent poets with whom his life has been closely associated." And in the article, *Theodore Watts-Dunton*, in *Chambers's Encyclopædia*, the writer remarks soon after *The Coming of Love* was published: " The chief note of his poetry—much of it written in youth—is its individuality, the sources of its inspiration, Nature." Indeed, when writing upon *The Poetic Interpretation of Nature*, in the *Athenæum*, in 1877, the influence of the " scientific atmosphere "

of J. K. Watts's library upon Watts-Dunton's mind in the early days at St. Ives is perhaps more apparent than in any other pages of his numerous dissertations upon this famous subject in his writings. The question that most frequently occupied his thoughts from boyhood was: "What are to be the future relations between science and poetry? . . . As to the wisdom of the generalization upon life," he has said, "and the ripeness of the meditation upon the mystery of the universe sometimes found scattered in plays which we know from external evidence to have been early, it seems to be forgotten that boys, even in these days when leading a country life, are often very meditative, more meditative perhaps than men. But meditation was the intellectual note of the time when Shakespeare was a boy. It is difficult for us in a vulgar, sordid, wealth-worshipping society like that of the England and America of the present hour, to understand the temper of the great."

And again, when he marked the following passage in the Preface to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in the "Henry Irving" Shakespeare—and he was a man who marked passages that attracted him in nearly every book he read—this same idea was uppermost in his thoughts: "It may seem fanciful to trace throughout this play the influence of the country rather than that of the town on Shakespeare's style; but there is certainly less knowledge of character than observation of nature displayed in the imagery of this play."

One can frequently detect a reference to early poetic

meditation even in the pages of his very latest work. It is his own personal experience in boyhood at St. Ives, no less than that which he attributes to Shakespeare in his boyhood at Stratford-on-Avon, that he so graphically describes in his Preface to the World's Classics edition of Shakespeare.

"It is a singular fact in regard to the king of dramatists," he remarked, "that although his representations of life were written to be acted, the most delightful way of enjoying them is not to see them on the stage—where, too often, the obtrusive personality of the actor blurs or is mingled with Shakespeare's own vision of the character—not even to study them in the closet, but to read them in the open air, along the banks of a river—the Avon, say, or the Ouse, or the Upper Thames—or under the wavering shadows of English trees, with the music of the summer birds and the distant bleat of the sheep lending an accompaniment to the music of the poet's verse. . . . As I have pointed out elsewhere, we see constantly that while Shakespeare was toiling in London there was, beneath the consciousness of whatsoever he was working upon, the mirror of youthful memory. This mirror was bright with the shimmer of the Avon as it wound through the meadows he loved—meadows coloured with the tints of the Warwickshire flowers. Whenever he was in need of a poetical image to illustrate a passage, he had only to look down into this mirror, and there was the picture he wanted."

XIII.

POETRY PUBLISHED AFTER "THE COMING OF LOVE."

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THE patriotic note in Watts-Dunton's poetry has often been remarked upon. During the Egyptian War, when the French paper *Le Rappel* contended that England stood isolated, without a single ally, he wrote his well-known sonnet—

"She stands alone . . ."

which is to be found in *The Jubilee Greeting at Spithead to the Men of Greater Britain.**

In *Christmas at the Mermaid* we have a fervent description of the Armada's destruction. At the time of the publication of this poem (in 1897) he was thought to have invented the striking story of the Welsh galley-slave, David Gwynn, who by heading a mutiny among his fellow-slaves on board the "queen-galley" *Vasana*, and then attacking and capturing the *Vasana's* consort, *The Royal*, damaged the fighting power of the Armada after it left Ferrol Bay. Motley, however, as Watts-Dunton has affirmed, treats the story as being absolutely historic, though Froude ignores it, and Professor

* Published by John Lane, The Bodley Head (1897).

Laughton, a greater authority than either of these, discusses the matter in one of the volumes of the Navy Record Society.

Lord Latymer greatly admired this poem, and at the time when he was editing the Flowers of Parnassus series for Mr. John Lane, *Christmas at the Mermaid* was published in Vol. XI. Watts-Dunton and Lord Latymer met frequently in the days when *The Coming of Love* and *Aylwin* appeared. In a letter from the Riviera, dated December 1902, Lord Latymer tells Watts-Dunton how he has just finished reading *Aylwin* the second time.

Not long before his death Watts-Dunton was reading with much interest Lord Latymer's poem, *Psyche*, which he often spoke of with enthusiasm as a "wonderful new reading of an old idea." He and Lord Latymer corresponded, especially on literary subjects, for many years, though in later days they seldom met.

Christmas at the Mermaid brought Watts-Dunton many appreciative letters. He sent Mr. Thomas Hardy a copy of a new edition of *The Mermaid* as a Christmas greeting. The acknowledgment from Max Gate is dated December 2, 1901, and in this letter Mr. Hardy says :—

"I have been beginning Christmas, in a way, by reading over the fire your delightful little *Christmas at the Mermaid*, which it was most kind of you to send. I was carried back right into Armada times by David Gwynn's vivid story; it seems remarkable that

you should have had the conjuring power to raise up those old years so brightly in your own mind first, as to be able to exhibit them to readers in such high relief of three dimensions, as one may say. The *absence* of Shakespeare strikes me as being one of the finest touches of the poem: it throws one into a 'humorous melancholy;' and we feel him, in some curious way, more than if he had been there." . . .

Watts-Dunton was very severe in his strictures upon poets and prose writers who lacked artistic conscience. "With all Walter Scott's greatness as a narrative poet, and he was very great, his lack of artistic conscience," Watts-Dunton would say, "damaged and weakened his work." . . . "Nothing would impel me to versify except when in the mood." When asked by the editor of a London journal to write a sonnet upon the centenary of Browning's birth, he said: "It has always been a peculiarity of mine that I never could write a line of poetry unless and until I felt a strong impulse come upon me to do it, and that impulse, for some reason or another, I do not feel now as I did when Rossetti and Tennyson died."

While engaged in his various introductions to volumes of the World's Classics, his sonnet-sequence, *The Work of Cecil Rhodes*, was published by the Oxford University Press. There are passages in the Introduction of peculiar interest at the present time that illustrate his political attitude—especially his strong Imperialism.

"If a wave of cynicism," he says, "has swept over us; if enthusiasm is, nowadays, in bad form, and if it is really the fashion to laugh at the imperialistic dreamer of dreams, and his grandiose sepulchre on the Matoppo Hills—as I am told it is—I should like to show that in this imperialistic 'madness' of his there was a kind of 'method' after all.

"Just let me ask, Is there not a tremendous struggle coming on in Europe—a struggle of races—that will make all the dynamic struggles of the past seem as insignificant as any Battle of the Frogs and Mice? Must not outlets for the population of the Old World be found in temperate zones? . . .

"With regard to the Rhodes story, let me give a succinct summary of the facts.

"In the early eighties the British boundary on the north was the Orange River, at parallel 28. It was Kruger's desire—a very natural desire, from his own point of view as a Dutch patriot—to bring the territory north of this line—for through it ran the great South African trade route—under the dominion of the Vierkleur. Rhodes knew this, and he knew something more. He knew of the great German dream of absorbing not only the territory now called after Rhodes' name, but the two Dutch republics.

"In 1879 the German traveller Ernst von Weber had already proposed to Prince Bismarck to create a belt of German Empire stretching, transversely, right across the continent from German East Africa to Ger-

man West Africa. In order to understand Rhodes and his scheme, it is necessary to quote the very words of the document.

" ' If a European Power were to succeed in bringing these countries gradually altogether under its dominion, or at least under its political influence, a kingdom would be won thereby which in circumference as well as in wealth of production would not be second to the British East Indian Empire. It was this free, unlimited room for annexation in the north, this open access to the heart of Africa, which principally inspired me with the idea, now more than four years ago, that Germany should try, by the acquisition of Delagoa Bay and the subsequent continual influx of German emigrants to the Transvaal, to secure the future dominion over this country, and so to pave the way for the foundation of a German-African Empire of the future.'

" The Portuguese too had a similar dream.

" Now what would have resulted if these schemes had not been frustrated by Rhodes' expedition northward to the point where Salisbury now stands? England's dominance in South Africa would have come to an end. I, for my part, think that the Cape itself, the keystone of the imperial arch, must eventually have been lost: that is to say, the Empire of Rhodes' ' finest race in history ' would in a few years have crumbled to pieces. This consideration, even more than the fact that Rhodes' immortal expedition won for England 1,500,000 square miles in a glorious climate, was what

made some of us take so passionate an interest in the work of Cecil Rhodes."

From the poem the following sonnet may be selected as typical of the spirit and treatment of the writer :—

" Men ask, ' Who shaped this mausoleum here
Of Nature-builded towers and bastioned piles,
Stretching right on for half a hundred miles,
Which symbols Rhodes, for it has no compeer ? '
It symbols you, they say, great pioneer,—
Save where a lonely lakelet, dimpling, smiles
With purple bloom of lotus-lily isles—
' Because 'tis stern, imperious, strong, austere.'
They ask, ' What giant shaped these aisles of granite,
On what wild methods of what lawless planet,
Or crazy comet's mad, enormous modes ? '—
No Titan built them for a Titan race :
I carved a province for your burying-place :
Africa's yearning dreams foresaw you, Rhodes."

Watts-Dunton's election as a member of the Omar Khayyám Club (founded in 1892) was in 1896, but he never went to their gatherings except once or twice during the first year of becoming an " Omarian," principally owing to his numerous engagements. His poem entitled *Toast to the Omar Khayyám* was inspired at the time Rossetti " discovered " FitzGerald's poem in the penny box of the second-hand bookseller ; for the famous translator of *Omar* being well known in East Anglia, a few Omarians had their little club on the banks of the Ouse, among whom was known Watts-Dunton long before the present " Omar " club was started.

Years afterwards Watts-Dunton wrote another poem—the sonnet called *Prayer to the Winds*—suggested by the ceremony of planting at the head of FitzGerald's grave "two rose-trees whose ancestors had scattered their petals over the tomb of Omar Khayyám."

In May 1911 he was elected an honorary member of the club—an event that afforded him considerable pleasure, as the following letter to Mr. John Henderson, the honorary secretary, indicates:—

"The Pines,
"*May 8th*, 1911.

"Dear Mr. Henderson,

"It is most kind of the Committee of the Omar Khayyám Club to elect me an honorary member, and, believe me, I deeply appreciate it.

"It is years since I had the great pleasure of meeting you all. I think it was down at Burford Bridge, when George Meredith made that charming speech of his, and when L. F. Austin spoke so admirably. Gissing was there, I remember, and Groome, and several others that we all loved and now mourn.

"If I have not been a good attendant at the annual dinners, it has not been because I fail to realize that no more genial and delightful group of good fellows exists than the members of the Omar Khayyám Club.

"Edward Clodd came to see me yesterday, and gave me a delightful afternoon, which I shall long remember. Our talk ran much upon the members—Sir W. Nicoll and Clement Shorter, and the rest of you.

"I have always been a poor diner-out, and I have always loved seclusion.

"With kindest regards to you and the Committee,

"Believe me to be,

"Most sincerely yours,

"THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON.

"John Henderson, Esq.,
"Ingleside,
"Weybridge."

Watts-Dunton was in his happiest frame of mind while evolving a poem. In speaking of literary style he once said: "The best test is in reading aloud. One might fancy that no one could write musical prose or verse who did not himself thus try the sound. Milton's most sonorous verse was dictated in blindness; and we all know how Rossetti, Swinburne, and Tennyson would 'mouth' their own lines." The motive for a sonnet would often come to Watts-Dunton in his desultory readings. For instance, he was one day referring to Amsterdam Island in an old gazetteer. It was therein affirmed that the Chinese had been familiar with that remote and desolate volcanic rock in the Indian Ocean before its discovery by the Dutch navigator Van Vlaming, and there was a tradition in connection with the island that in certain seasons of the year the shores are surrounded by a ring of music which is caused by waves striking upon the coast—

"... That island, far away and lone,
Whose shores are as a harp, where billows break
In spray of music ..."

as Watts-Dunton described it. For it was the fantastic sound of that strange music that appealed to his imagination and inspired him to sing.

His sonnet on Coleridge, "I see thee pine like her in golden story," was suggested by a paragraph cut from some daily newspaper :—

"I see thee pine like her in golden story
Who, in her prison, woke and saw, one day,
The gates thrown open—saw the sunbeams play,
With only a web 'tween her and summer's glory;
Who, when that web—so frail, so transitory,
It broke before her breath—had fallen away,
Saw other webs and others rise for aye,
Which kept her prisoned till her hair was hoary.

"The songs half sung that yet were all-divine—
That woke romance, the queen to reign afresh,—
Had been but preludes from that lyre of thine,
Could thy rare spirit's wings have pierced the mesh
Spun by the wizard who compels the flesh,
But lets the poet see how heav'n can shine."

Concerning this poem George Meredith wrote : "The sonnet is pure amber for a piece of descriptive analogy that fits the poet wonderfully. . . . There is Coleridge ! But whence the source of your story—if anything of such aptness could have been other than dreamed after a draught of Xanadu—I cannot tell."

Nor could Watts-Dunton himself ever recall from whence the story came, for he lost the newspaper cutting at the time he was writing the poem; but he had no doubt that it was founded on some Eastern tale.

His interest in Eastern legends was apparent throughout his life. And nothing delighted him more than to relate some of these tales to his guests over a cup of tea and a cigarette. He was no lover of tobacco, but a box of cigarettes was always at hand, and in order not to appear unsociable he would join his friends in a smoke. He seldom took more than a puff or two at his cigarette, but continued to finger it and lift it to his lips while talking, as though absent-mindedly satisfied that it was still alight.

One of his favourite tales was that in which Buddhagosha seeks to teach the lesson of the universality of sorrow and death—the one in which the weeping girl Kisogátamí asks him to "raise her dead child to life." The sage answers, "Only one thing can effect that miracle—a grain of mustard seed obtained from a contented man." The woman sought everywhere for that grain of mustard seed, but never procured it, since she found that there was no such thing as a contented man in this world.

At the dinner table at The Pines that favourite subject, the detective story, was frequently mooted. Every one imagined that it began in 1842 with the *Investigations of the Chevalier Dupin*, who unravels a web which has been woven for the express purpose of unravelling. But although, as Watts-Dunton admitted, the present-day detective story was obviously suggested by Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and its sequel, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, its origin is as old as the hills. He

would then go on to prove his theory by narrating the story of *The Dervish and the Lost Camel*:—

"A strong story remains as fresh for centuries after it is written as when it first appeared. All other forms of prose fiction may have their day. The sentimental pathos of Richardson, the manly breadth of Fielding, the whimsical profundities of Sterne, the bracing optimism of Scott, the humorous exaggeration of Dickens, the humorous truthfulness of Thackeray, the philosophical way of looking upon man and nature of George Eliot, belong to literature. They may each one of them be in harmony or out of harmony with the temper of any given time; but a strong and interesting story has an appeal which is in a sense immortal and irresistible. The story of the *Odyssey* is as new to-day as it was when first told. From age to age a striking story goes on, and from nation to nation. I have on a previous occasion shown how the authors of *The Polish Jew*—dramatized as *The Bells*—received what seemed to be a new story, in which expectation and not surprise was the source of interest, from a poem by Chamisso, and how Chamisso received it from remote Eastern sources. We have done the same with regard to the story of King Lear and his daughters, tracing it to the Indian story of Dirghatamas and Yayâtis. We have seen it quite lately affirmed that the Sherlock Holmes of Dr. Conan Doyle is simply Dupin devoid of that philosophical basis for his analyses which characterizes Poe's

hero. But rest assured that the story of a web of incidents unravelled by analytical genius—the story of induction of which Dumas (in *Monte Cristo*), Wilkie Collins, Dickens, Edgar Poe, Gaboriau, and Dr. Conan Doyle are such masters—is as old as the hills. Every one should remember Voltaire's brilliant effort in this line. Again, the story of *The Dervish and the Lost Camel*, from which all later stories of induction are derived, was not invented by Colton, who told it so admirably, but by some old Eastern story-teller. It is a striking example of the way in which one style of interesting story will beget a score of descendants.

"A dervish was journeying alone in the desert when two merchants suddenly met him. 'You have lost a camel,' said he to the merchants. 'Indeed we have,' they replied. 'Was he not blind in his right eye, and lame in his left leg?' said the dervish. 'He was,' replied the merchants. 'And had he not lost a tooth?' 'He had,' said the merchants. 'And was he not loaded with honey on one side and wheat on the other?' 'Most certainly he was,' they replied; 'and as you have seen him so lately and marked him so particularly, we pray you to conduct us to him.' 'My friends,' said the dervish, 'I have never seen your camel, nor ever heard of him but from you.' 'A pretty story truly!' said the merchants; 'but where are the jewels which formed a part of his cargo?' 'I have neither seen your camel nor your jewels,' repeated the dervish. On this they seized his person, and forthwith hurried him before a

justice, where, on the strictest search, nothing could be found upon him, either of falsehood or of theft. They were then about to proceed against him *as a sorcerer*, when the dervish, with great calmness, thus addressed the court: 'I have been much pleased with your surprise, and own that there has been some ground for your suspicions; but I have lived long and alone, and I can find ample scope for observation, even in a desert. I knew that I had crossed the track of a camel that had strayed from its owner, because I saw no mark of any human footstep on the same route. I knew that the animal was blind in one eye, because it had cropped the herbage only on one side of its path; and I perceived that it was lame in one leg from the faint impression which that particular foot had produced upon the sand. I concluded that the animal had lost one tooth, because, wherever it had grazed, a small tuft of herbage was left uninjured in the centre of its bite. As to that which formed the burden of the beast, the busy ants informed me that it was corn on the one side, and the clustering flies that it was honey on the other.' "

Watts-Dunton's thoughts, as we have shown, were constantly through life running on Oriental fiction. Within a month of the appearance of his first critique in the *Athenæum*, he wrote a column in that journal on the subject of Edgar Poe and Persian literature:—*

* August 30, 1876.

"I have read Mr. Ingram's letter with considerable interest. Now that the subject of Edgar Poe and his works is on the *tapis* again, I wish that some one could say whence arose the extraordinary talk that was current in London some years ago, and which often got into print, about *The Raven* being an adaptation from the Persian! The most definite form the story took was this: Mr. Lang—Mr. 'Mofussilite' Lang, according to a paragraph in *Tait's Magazine*—heard *The Raven* for the first time repeated by a friend, and cried out, 'Hallo! that's very good Persian,' and then quoted the original. The story is at least curious. But was Poe, as has been said, a Persian scholar? As to the originality of *The Raven*, surely no creature but Edgar Poe could ever have conceived it, as none certainly could have executed it. Indeed, after all that has been said about his dispute with Longfellow, the only piece of direct plagiarism that can, as far as I know, be brought against his poems is in those oft-quoted lines in *Eulalie* :—

> "'I dwelt alone,
> In a world of moan,
> And my soul was a stagnant tide.'

Striking as is the use of the adjective *stagnant*, as descriptive of a tide, many will be distressed to learn that it is not so original as it seems, but was suggested apparently by a still more striking use of the same adjective in the *Rejected Addresses* :—

> "'Bear me straight, meandering ocean,
> Whence the *stagnant* torrents flow.'

But with regard to his prose stories, each one of which has a most striking *motif*, it would be surprising indeed if we did not, now and then, come upon narratives which he must have used as suggestions. I hope Mr. Ingram will forgive me for saying that, with all my admiration of Poe's astonishing powers, I cannot agree with him that Mr. Mudford's story in *Blackwood*, called *The Iron Shroud*, was not read by Poe, and turned by him into *The Pit and the Pendulum*, with the Poe-like additional terrôrs of heated walls and loathsome pit.

"Again, take the narrative of *Arthur Gordon Pym*, and compare it with the Scottish story of *Allan Gordon*, with the 'spectre bark' of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, and with a very remarkable narrative, called *The Lonely Man of the Ocean*, which appeared in the *Monthly Magazine*, No. LXI., four years before Poe's story came out in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, and you will see at once the suggestions for *Arthur Gordon Pym*, and the way in which they crystallized into new forms in Poe's mind.

"Yet, any one who should from this infer that Poe's genius was not one of the most original that has ever found expression in our literature, would be a poor psychologist indeed, and I am glad to see that he has begun to tell his stories anew in *La République des Lettres*, where *L'Enterrement Prématuré* is concluded this week."

XIV.

"AYLWIN."

XIV.

"AYLWIN."

THAT Watts-Dunton was occupied for twenty years or more in the writing of *The Coming of Love* and *Aylwin*, is only true in a certain sense. During those identical years, as already mentioned, he was contributing, week by week, articles to the *Athenæum*, fine discursive essays rather than (as they purported to be) criticisms of contemporary poets and novelists. But while writing about the poetry and fiction of others, he was cultivating his own creative gifts. Another thing bearing directly upon those years of literary toil must always be borne in mind: in no sense did he ever lead the life of a recluse. On the contrary, he enjoyed to the full every kind of London society. Whether at political or social functions, at literary, artistic, and theatrical At Homes, such as Madox Brown's, Westland Marston's, Mathilde Blind's, and a score of others, Watts-Dunton was always to be seen. Moreover, notwithstanding all these diversions, having settled down as house-mates at The Pines, he and Swinburne gave luncheons and dinner parties to half the famous people in the world of art and letters. No wonder it took Watts-

Dunton years to complete that gypsy romance, *Aylwin*, and its sequel, *The Coming of Love!* And further, let it be noted, he never entirely severed his connection with legal affairs until 1900, when he gave up his chambers in Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

In the preface to the novel he thus defines the motive as one of an ambitious and poetic nature:—

"*Aylwin* is a story written as a comment on love's warfare with death—written for no other purpose than to show that, confronted as man is every moment by signs of the fragility and the brevity of human life, the great marvel connected with him is not that his thoughts dwell frequently upon the unknown country beyond Orion, where the beloved dead are loving us still, but that he can find time and patience to think upon anything else—a story written further to show how terribly despair becomes intensified when a man has lost—or thinks he has lost—a woman whose love was the only light of his world—when his soul is torn from his body, as it were, and whisked off on the wings of the 'viewless winds,' right away beyond the furthest star, till the universe hangs beneath his feet a trembling point of twinkling light, and at last even this dies away, and his soul cries out for help in that utter darkness and loneliness.

"It was to depict this phase of human emotion that both *Aylwin* and its sequel, *The Coming of Love*, were written. They were missives from the lonely watch-

tower of the writer's soul, sent out into the strange and busy battle of the world—sent out to find, if possible, another soul or two to whom the watcher was, without knowing it, akin."

Aylwin narrowly escaped publication in the old "three-decker" form in 1885, for, with the exception of the last few chapters, the proofs were set up and corrected in pages by Watts-Dunton.

Between this date (1885) and the date of publication (1898) numerous letters from Messrs. Hurst and Blackett were received by Watts-Dunton at The Pines; for the publishers were being constantly reminded by the printers that no progress was being made with the proofs of the novel, and they anxiously inquired what Messrs. Hurst and Blackett now proposed to do in the matter. The page proofs remained in Watts-Dunton's hands at The Pines, only partially revised, for close upon fourteen years. These letters from the publishers that came at short intervals, reminding him that it was long since *Aylwin* proofs had made any advance, failed to move him. It neither led to his posting to the printers any continuation of the copy with a view to completing the work, nor to his sending any corrected proofs for press. In 1898 there were still a few "three deckers" being published, and it was only at the last moment that Watts-Dunton decided to publish *Aylwin* in the new one-volume form.

The novel was read in proof by a large number of Watts-Dunton's literary friends, and in many cases he adopted their suggestions, especially those put forward by F. H. Groome, which he always regarded as invaluable.

"It has been a pouring wet day here, and I have largely devoted it to reading the proofs of *Aylwin*. I have finished them, and will post you them either to-day or to-morrow, for I doubt if a letter-box will admit the package. I have made a few pencilled marginalia, chiefly queries, which will explain themselves. I think it would be better to cut down the Romany somewhat, for two reasons: the first, that Gypsies don't use Romany in talking to Gorgios, who wouldn't understand it; the second and chief one, that in several places it will render the meaning quite unintelligible to most of your readers. . . . I don't like the intrusion of the Hungarian Gypsies; it strikes me as quite unnecessary and false. And I don't like the Gypsy bridal costume, which seems to me stagey."

No one took a keener interest in *Aylwin* during its progress in manuscript, and afterwards in proof, than William Sharp ("Fiona Macleod"). When returning the proof sheets (in 1885) which Watts-Dunton had lent him, he wrote the most appreciative letter that the author ever received from any friend about the novel:—

" My dear Watts,

" I have carefully read (and here and there re-read) the chapters of *Aylwin* which you sent to me. I can honestly say that I have been most deeply impressed with the power and romantic beauty of the book. Primarily, this seems to me its great merit, that it is a true *romance—i.e.*, it is a narrative permeated with that really rare romanticism which only a few natures in each generation pre-eminently possess, or at any rate give expression to. It is impossible in reading it not to feel that it is the production of an essentially poetic nature, and this not specially on account of ardent language or luxuriant illustration, but mainly because of a certain subdued yet potent glow that animates it throughout, like those widespread fires that move continually beneath that still marshland in the remotest part of Brittany.

" Looking at it from a strictly literary point of view, I am much struck by its consistency—in other words, by the author's intensity of emotion throughout. It seems to have been written with what may be called artistic impetuosity; indeed, one could almost imagine it having been composed with the extraordinary rapidity of George Sand when writing *Leone Leoni*. And this thing which I notice—a characteristic not of English novelists in general, but of French—is the clearness of outline amidst seeming vagueness. You do not say much in detailing certain things or incidents, yet they mirror in definite outlines, distinct images;

this, as you know, is a rare faculty, and especially so among our fellow-writers.

"The first part is distinctly idyllic—very charmingly so. As the interest grows more intense, I note how the shadow of coming disaster is finely suggested through certain ominous notes. That is an exceedingly fine passage in 'The Sea's Warning,' on the deep sympathy between the sea and the soul of man; and a vibration of electric sympathy thrills the reader at the passing, without any cloud to cast it, of a shadow across the sparkling brilliance of the moonlit sea. The most apathetic reader must be stirred by the weird touches anent the shriek that so mysteriously fills the night, and which both Aylwin and Winifred shudder so to hear. Here is that true weirdness, so distinct from the pseudo-weirdness of so many contemporary writers. In what you have written here and there in the chapters, 'A Father's Curse,' 'The Sea's Warning,' and 'A Duel with Circumstance,' I have several times been affected in somewhat the same manner as, for example, in the shadow-tree passage in Rossetti's *King's Tragedy;* nor do I remember anything in contemporary fiction more terrible in its way than the discovery of Wynne's body among the fallen debris of the cliff, the horrible death-face ghastly in the moonlight, and the mysterious cross flashing banefully on the breast of the despoiler.

"Do you remember a short tale by Émile Souvestre, called, I think, 'The Bargeman of the Loire'? There is a dramatically terrible passage therein concerning the

death of a somnambulist. This man, thirty or forty years before, had been one of those 'drowners' who had carried out Carrier's infamous 'Loire marriages,' and in the story—in his old age, and at a crisis in his son's life, who knows nothing of his father's past history—he is seen in a time of ice-flood in a somnambulist's trance, darting furiously hither and thither among the breaking floes, and thrusting down the appealing arms of the visionary victims of yore. The central incident has always vividly remained with me, but in effect the dramatically horrible passage of the finding of Wynne has impressed me even more.

"If the title had not been already used by a famous author, you might have fitly called your romance *Destiny*.

"The irresistibility of Fate, the overwhelming power of Circumstance, find genuine expression in your pages. As through Æschylus, as through Omar Khayyám, there is beyond the general light an ominous shadow—of inevitable descent.

"When I have finished reading the story I will write to you again, giving you my ultimate impression. Please send me the remaining pages as soon as you can, so that the continuity in my mind need be as little broken as possible.

"Meanwhile, I feel assured that you will have a great success. The emotion is genuine, the passion veritable, the incidents enthralling; what more is needed? It is true, the style is different from your

later style, but what of that? A romance is not a critical essay. (*N.B.*—Why so many brackets? And why —on page 1—'sheer deep'?)

"I have allowed my wife to see the proofs. She is as fascinated by *Aylwin* as I am, and intensely eager to read the continuation. As she wants to re-read the proofs, I keep them for a few days longer, but will let you have them by the latter part of the week at latest.

"I must close now in haste. Congratulating you, *cher ami*, on your sure success, and thanking you for the great pleasure I have had and hope to have in re-perusal,

"Ever affectionately yours,

"WILLIAM SHARP."*

Watts-Dunton's mind was greatly exercised as to the choice of a title for this novel.

"It is interesting to observe," he once remarked, "how very much novelists vary in their theories and in their practice as to what is the best class of names for what may be called 'commercial purposes.' Every novelist knows that the question of the title in a novel is very important. Dickens would submit a score of names to his friends for criticism, and then perhaps in the end not select one of the names after all. Walter

* After the publication of the novel, William Sharp invariably commenced his letters to Watts-Dunton with "My dear Aylwin." William Sharp's first novel, *The Sport of Chance* (1888), is inscribed to "Theodore Watts, Poet, Romancist, Critic."

Scott affirmed that the best of all names is the one that suggests nothing except itself. That Scott acted upon this principle is clear enough by his titles, such as *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering*, *The Fair Maid of Perth*, *Ivanhoe*, etc. Should the story become popular, as in the case of *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Villette*, *Silas Marner*, etc., the name has an individual *timbre*. It suggests the tone and feeling of the story without any of the disturbing effect which is seen in the descriptive name. And yet no doubt the descriptive name has certain advantages of its own. Where the story achieves only a moderate success, a descriptive name may be so full of suggestions that it entices many a reader to take it up who otherwise would never have done so.

"It is to be noticed that whenever a novelist or a playwriter starts his career with a certain class of names he generally clings to that system. Sometimes he pushes this method so far as to be almost absurd, as in the plays of T. W. Robertson. Because *Caste* turned out to be an unexpected success, the writer ever after adopted a monosyllabic name, like *School*, *War*. With regard to the descriptive name, it is interesting to remember that Mr. Thomas Hardy's beautiful story, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, originally bore quite a different title—a name with no suggestion at all. But he was afterwards persuaded to change the title to *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and as it was a success, he followed it up with tales bearing such titles as *Far from the Madding Crowd*, etc."

In adopting the title of *Aylwin* for his own novel, Watts-Dunton followed Scott's example; but among the numerous names which suggested themselves to him while he was at work upon the story the following are of interest as having a distinctly sensational flavour, very different in character from the title ultimately chosen: *The Curse and the Cross*, *Fate's Golden Hand*, *The Golden Hand*, *The Scripture of Love*, *The Blessing and the Curse*, *The Voice of the Sea*.

Of the charm of *Aylwin* there can be no question, to all susceptible to romantic atmosphere. It has in generous measure that primal emotional quality wherein lies the secret of every popular romance; and in addition to this it contains, especially in its later portion, scenes and characters that compel the interest of the cultured and fastidious reader.

The book, however, would have gained greatly in power and artistic homogeneity had it been shorter by a third; and there is little doubt, we fear, that the holding back of the novel for so many years of revision is responsible for those defects of which the critical reader is conscious from time to time.

The primal simplicity of the theme is somewhat marred by the elaborate discussions that seem too obviously tacked on to it. The story-teller becomes lost in the *causeur;* and the methods of the *causeur* are fundamentally inimical to the methods of the story-teller. That the book, despite these weaknesses, should not only have won so instantaneous a success, but have

retained its popularity of appeal down to the present day, is a tribute to the romantic power of the writer, especially to his choice of *milieu* for his story. Without its Welsh setting we cannot imagine the tale would have proved half so fascinating to the majority of readers. Assuredly the accident that induced the author to discard Venice in favour of Wales was an extremely happy one.

Then, again, the transcendental conception of the universe epitomized in the phrase "The Renascence of Wonder," and already familiar to thousands of readers in its purely literary aspect, appealed very strongly to many minds. Coming at a time when imaginative literature was devitalized by the generalizations of modern science, it produced the same effect in its garb of fiction as the Pre-Raphaelite movement had in art. It was mystical without being definitely metaphysical; and while it was welcomed by many to whom the materialistic preconceptions of the universe were repellent, it delighted many also who wished to retain the poetry of religion without necessarily subscribing to its dogmas.

In *Aylwin* there is no doubt that Watts-Dunton shows the influence of Charlotte Brontë and George Borrow. He would rather have written *Jane Eyre*, as he often declared, than any other novel he ever read. And, as he has said in his work on Poetry, "perhaps there are critics of a very high rank who would class as poems romances so concrete in method and diction and

so full of poetic energy as *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, where we get absolutely all that Aristotle requires for a poem."*

In *Aylwin*, after the manner of the author of *Jane Eyre*, Watts-Dunton dwells at length upon the childhood of his heroine. Indeed, he expressed it as his opinion that the introduction of the hero and heroine in their early youth in the opening chapters of a novel was greatly to be commended. He argued that it gave an air of great realism; and as to the autobiographical form of narrative, which he adopted in *Aylwin*, he would not only quote *Jane Eyre*, but other notable works of fiction, to show how far more convincing was a novel as written thus than was a novel written in the historic form. At the same time, he was always ready to admit that the novel told in the first person was immensely more difficult when the question of construction came under discussion, especially if the plot was an intricate one.

Watts-Dunton's passion for the wilder aspects of nature was akin to that of "Currer Bell," and the way in which he uses his scenery as an emotional background is quite in the vein of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. His style, too, with its wealth of detail and its characteristic parentheses, presents some remarkable points of similarity.

Borrow's influence lies in the insistence of the open-air note, and of course the gypsy element. The dis-

* *Poetry and the Renascence of Wonder*. (Herbert Jenkins, 1916.)

cursiveness of Watts-Dunton is more literary than the discursiveness of Borrow, but, if rather more laboured and self-conscious, has much the same idiosyncratic quality.

The first question every friend would put to him when calling at The Pines, after receiving a genial greeting, was, "How's the novel progressing?"

He invariably assured them one and all that it was "finished—practically finished." In a letter dated December 1884 a friend wrote to him: "I hear on good authority that the novel will appear in the spring."

But it was not until fourteen years later, a morning in the spring of 1898, that the manuscript of *Aylwin* was finally sent off to the printers. The friend who assisted Watts-Dunton in passing the proofs of *Aylwin* through the press thus describes the occasion:—*

"A day or two was spent in arranging the manuscript and completing the pagination; and then I started off by train for Waterloo Station, the chosen custodian of a big portmanteau containing the complete MS. At Waterloo I stepped into a hansom—there were no taxi-cabs in 1898—and drove direct to the printers in Queen Victoria Street. The printers had received notice to expect 'copy,' which they were instructed to set up in galleys with as much despatch as possible. The novel had been announced by the publishers to appear in the early autumn. The rapidity and accuracy with

* Thomas Hake.

which the 'copy' was printed was—at least in my own 'proof-passing' experience—never equalled. The moment the galleys began to arrive at The Pines, Watts-Dunton 'leapt upon them,' to use his own favourite expression, 'like a tiger.' For six months, almost to a day, we worked on those proofs unceasingly. On frequent occasions I would sit in my study of an evening with the slips before me, conning over Watts-Dunton's emendations (they were very numerous throughout) until four o'clock in the morning, and then, after a couple of hours' sleep, would start conning over them once more. We had begun upon the proofs in May; the last slip was sent to the printers marked 'for press' late in October."

With regard to the most striking incident in *Aylwin* —the transmission of hysteria—"subjects of this kind," Watts-Dunton says, "were frequently discussed between Gordon Hake and myself. But Hake was remarkably sceptical about all psychological phenomena; while I, who at one time gave great attention to biological science, took an interest in these phenomena which he thought a little mystical. Indeed, he went so far as to throw doubts on everything connected with mesmerism, a subject upon which I never had any doubts whatever." The transmission of hysteria mentioned in *Aylwin* was a matter of fact, and the quotation given from the *Daily Telegraph* was an actual quotation, except that the name of the operator was changed.

During a visit with Swinburne to Cromer for one of their "midsummer holidays," wishing to see the landslip there which he has described in *Aylwin*, a curious incident occurred while Watts-Dunton was walking from "Poppy-land" to the old ruined churchyard called "The Garden of Sleep." He sat down, with the lady* who accompanied him, in the shade of an empty hut near the cliff. Coming back, Watts-Dunton remarked that the cliff there was very dangerous, and ought to be fenced off, as the fatal landsprings were beginning to show their work. Two or three weeks after this a portion of the cliff at that point, weighing many thousands of tons, fell into the sea, the hut in which they had sat falling with it.

Many friends expressed a hope that Watts-Dunton would some day allow *Aylwin* to be dramatized. Indeed, the novel has been dramatized by more than one playwright; but the author would never give his sanction to its production on the stage. Moreover, a Welsh composer wrote a libretto with a view to writing an opera founded on the story. The libretto showed, in Watts-Dunton's opinion, great merit, and the two dramas when submitted to him gained from him high praise. But nothing ever came of all this, owing to his "absorption in other matters of literary interest—matters that were of more immediate importance," as he would express it. But as a matter of fact, the late Edward S. Willard, whose judgment had great weight

* Miss Clara Reich (Mrs. Watts-Dunton).

with Watts-Dunton, gave it as his opinion that *Aylwin* would be "spoilt by dramatization;" and it was doubtless this verdict that caused him to withhold his permission to have it produced.

"Knowing how enormous is the pressure of an actor-manager on tour," he wrote to Willard on May 8, 1904, "I cannot but be touched by your kindness in making time to read *Aylwin*. And, of course, it is most gratifying to me to get your kind words about it.

"Now that the story is fresh in your mind, you can without much trouble give me an opinion which might be of very great service to me. Ever since the publication of the story people have been approaching me with projects for dramatizing it. I have persistently discountenanced the idea, because I do not think that it could be dramatized satisfactorily. Among other difficulties, I do not see what could be done with the most interesting character, Sinfi Lovell. And, again, such charm as there is in the story depends largely upon romantic atmosphere and scenery which could hardly be achieved on the boards. Of course I am aware that there are a good many striking scenes which might be dramatized; but I know quite enough of the acted drama to be conscious that a string of striking scenes would not make a play. I have said so to those who have been approaching me during the last five years. Busy as you are, I would not dream of asking you to write me a critical letter upon this subject; but I should

greatly like to know (and without delay) whether or not the story strikes you as dramatizable. 'Yes' or 'No' on a postcard would be quite enough for me. I would then wait for your return to London, and call upon you, and ask you to tell me *why* you said 'Yes' or 'No.'"

The success of *Aylwin*, which appeared early in October 1898, was assured from the day of its publication. Several thousand copies were sold during the first six weeks. On December 1, 1898, Watts-Dunton's publishers wrote: "We shall have 5,500 copies of *Aylwin* ready for sale between now and Christmas, and we shall have more printing. I think this ought to meet every demand." Within six months of its appearance the novel reached its seventeenth edition; in fact, 700 of that edition had been sold, as a letter from Messrs. Hurst and Blackett shows, before May 8, 1899. The latest edition, which was in the press at the time of Watts-Dunton's death, is the twenty-sixth. It is the issue printed also in the World's Classics edition, with the two appendices—one "A Note on the Character of D'Arcy," the other "A Key to the Characters in *Aylwin*."

The success of *Aylwin* brought Watts-Dunton many requests from editors of magazines for permission to publish his next novel in serial form. But although he felt greatly tempted, especially in the case of one editor, who not only offered very handsome terms, but proposed having the story illustrated by a well-known artist, he was dissuaded by his friend Sir William Robertson

Nicoll, a man of exceptionally wide literary and journalistic experience, whose advice he sought at the time.

The letters of congratulation on the success of *Aylwin* would fill a large book, and the appreciative reviews of the novel, not only in England, in America, in the Colonies, but on the Continent, especially in France, would fill another equally bulky volume. Mr. Ernest Rhys, who took the deepest interest in *Aylwin*, when speaking to Watts-Dunton about the novel, expressed the opinion that Dr. Nicoll's article in the *Contemporary* was an arresting piece of criticism, and a genuinely sympathetic attempt to get at the author's philosophical attitude as a novel writer.

Many applications to make translations of *Aylwin* reached him. The last was from a lady in Würtemberg. Her letter is dated from Wangen, September 8, 1901 :—

"Having just read your book, *Aylwin*, I am so delighted with it," she writes, "that I ask you kindly to permit me to translate it into German, so that people here in Germany may also have the benefit of reading it. Being German, but having lived in England many years, I hope to be able to translate the book so that you will be satisfied with it. It is no easy task, but I shall try and do my best."

From France Watts-Dunton had requests for permission to translate not only for publication in volume

form but as a serial. He could not make up his mind, however, to give his consent to any one of his numerous applicants, for he failed to convince himself that any one of them had a sufficient knowledge of English to do justice to his novel in translation.

When *The Coming of Love* appeared, Watts-Dunton's friends again urged him to waste no more of his literary days in journalism. Still stronger appeals were made to him when *Aylwin* was published. He now began to give some heed to these appeals. His contributions to periodical literature, including the *Athenæum*, began to grow visibly less, and presently ceased almost entirely. Many of the leading publishers expressed a natural desire to secure "his next novel," and some of the terms offered were exceptionally generous. Few novelists ever met with such marked encouragement after the publication of a first work. He now devoted his declining years very largely to novel-writing: two novels were completed in manuscript at the time of his decease. One of these is a poetical romance depicting scenes in an ancestral mansion, where the heroine, a young and beautiful high-born girl, lives a lonely existence in great poverty on the mortgaged estate. He began to write this romance the moment *Aylwin* was published, and completed it after two or three years of almost incessant application. It so chanced that when he was at work upon the final chapter an inviting offer came from Messrs. Harper and Brothers for a novel from his pen, and Watts-Dunton felt sorely tempted

to place the manuscript of this new story in their hands for publication. But soon after the appearance of *Aylwin*, as it chanced, he had given Messrs. Hurst and Blackett a verbal promise that he would publish his next novel through their firm. Although there was never any agreement more binding than this verbal understanding, Watts-Dunton was at a loss to decide as to what course to pursue. After some weeks of procrastination, he resolved to leave the question as to the publication of *Vesprie Towers* in abeyance, having chanced upon a plot for another novel, called *Carniola* —a story that so absorbed him that all thought of publishing *Vesprie Towers* seemed driven from his mind.

Carniola, the manuscript of which he contracted to deliver to Messrs. Harper and Brothers in a year's time, was commenced in 1904; but it was not until ten years later—a few weeks before he died—that the work was finished. He described *Carniola* as a "story of open-air life, laid partly in England and partly in Hungary."

With reference to the other story, *Vesprie Towers*, he frequently suffered from fits of remorse over his procrastination. But he made no effort to place it in the hands of Messrs. Hurst and Blackett. As a matter of fact, he never once recurred to the manuscript after starting to work on *Carniola*.

Some curiosity was awakened among his friends as to the derivation of the title, *Carniola*. As a matter of fact, it is the name of the hero, who, owing to circumstances developed in the story, was so christened because

it was the name of the Hungarian town in which he was born. On the paternal side the hero belongs to the English patriciate, while on the maternal side he is Hungarian, and is made to exhibit the peculiar characteristics of both races. The heroine is the daughter of an English nobleman, and exhibits in her temperament the conflict between the yearnings of a thorough child of nature and the enticements of the artificial society in which she moves. Although some parts of the action take place on the Continent, notably in Hungary, the scene is mainly laid at the nobleman's country seat—the birthplace and residence of the heroine. Watts-Dunton at one time had the intention of calling the story *Carniola: a Romance of the Peerage*, but he afterwards abandoned the idea of a sub-title.

Watts-Dunton's attention to original work was necessarily intermittent. To a great extent his days were taken up in writing fugitive essays for the journal, or else in considering the manuscripts of friends and even strangers, and, whenever discovering merit, criticizing their productions, and encouraging them to further exertion. Moreover, he took the keenest delight in the progress of the work of past masters such as Tennyson, and even at times, as we have indicated in the case of Rossetti and Swinburne, rousing their slumbering intellects, when occasion called for it, out of their inertness, for he was endowed with a magnetic sympathy rarely to be found in the writing man. This extraordinary fostering of latent talent in other men

led to his being regarded in literary circles as the "nurse of genius;" but no one except he who has studied his surroundings in the early days can realize how all this originated.

The habit of hero-worship so deeply rooted in his dreamy nature during the meditative days at St. Ives could not be conquered. He went half through life without ever meeting in *propriâ persona* any man of literary fame except a passing glance of Borrow "contending with the billows" at Yarmouth. And when by chance he was brought into the closest touch with genius, hero-worship took tangible shape. He was fascinated by the mere presence of the novelist who wrote such prose as *Lavengro*, and a painter who could conceive and achieve a work of art such as *Dante's Dream*, or a poet who could evolve such a lyrical masterpiece as *Atalanta in Calydon*.

All the vexatious surroundings in connection with Rossetti's habits of life—his frequent moodiness, and, most of all, the shadow of chloral hovering in the midst, not only at Cheyne Walk but at Bognor, and finally at Birchington-on-Sea—seemed only to enhance Watts-Dunton's devotion. Nor was he alone as a hero-worshipper, in the case of Rossetti at least; other men felt the fascination of Rossetti's personality. "Few who came beneath the spell of his influence," Joseph Knight would say, "were able or desirous to shake it off. It was next to impossible to resist the enthusiasm with which his convictions were expressed, the contagion of

his bright, animated presence, the influence of his singularly winning voice."

Watts-Dunton's devotion with regard to his housemate at The Pines was no less profound. " He was of all men I have ever known," says Watts-Dunton in his Preface to the *Selections*, " the most entirely lovable. . . . But I must not trust myself to give full expression to the childlike charm of Swinburne." No doubt the poetic atmosphere on Putney Hill helped to make Watts-Dunton oblivious to its commonplace aspect. The author of *Atalanta* lived there, and it was there, in Watts-Dunton's opinion, that he produced some of his best work. It mattered nothing to him that " the Bard," as he loved to call him, was a source of constant anxiety, though, be it understood, the anxiety was purely imaginary. He gave so much thought to Swinburne's well-being that he was at times haunted by a presentiment that " something would happen." This was possibly due to an exaggerated estimate of his friend's childlike attributes. When Swinburne would, on occasion, lose his way in leafy bypaths beyond the windmill on Wimbledon Common (doubtless with set purpose), failing to appear at the luncheon table, Watts-Dunton grew visibly concerned. And when at the seaside together this anxious state of mind was even more noticeable. Watts-Dunton sometimes even expressed a dread lest, when taking his swim in the sea, Swinburne should be seized with cramp, or, still worse (as at Etretat), be carried away by the tide.

XV.

SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM.

XV.

Shakespearean Criticism.

NO sooner had Watts-Dunton passed the final proofs of his various essays for *Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature*, already referred to, than he was approached by Clarence McIlvaine, the London representative of Messrs. Harper and Brothers, with a proposal that he should edit a series of articles for their magazine on the tragedies and historical plays of Shakespeare. The illustrations for these articles were to be undertaken by Edwin Abbey, leaving Watts-Dunton, as editor, to invite writers of distinction to furnish essays upon the plays. Watts-Dunton, owing to his enthusiasm in connection with anything having reference to Shakespeare, unhesitatingly undertook this onerous task. It is true that in this series he only wrote essays on four plays, Swinburne also contributing three.* But the project involved a considerable amount of correspondence with Messrs. Harper and Brothers, with Edwin Abbey, and more especially with the numerous contributors. Owing to frequent though unavoidable delay

* For details regarding this series in *Harper's Magazine, vide* Appendix.

in the delivery of the drawings by Edwin Abbey for the various essays, Watts-Dunton became constantly diverted from his other literary projects for more than four or five years—from 1902 to 1907. The interruption was a serious one for a man of his artistic temperament; and, besides, at this time he was in the full swing of writing his novel, *Carniola*, and these years of distraction sometimes led to his putting the manuscript aside, as he had done in the case of *Aylwin*, for months at a time.

Lewis Campbell's stupendous acquaintance with Shakespeare's plays made him an interesting and ever-welcome visitor at The Pines, to Swinburne no less than to Watts-Dunton. At the time when Watts-Dunton was editing the Shakespeare series for *Harper's Magazine*, Lewis Campbell, when over seventy years of age, accepted the invitation to write the article on *Henry the Fourth*, which he declared he was reading for "the hundred and first time."

Many letters came to Swinburne and Watts-Dunton concerning their Shakespearean essays in this series. Mr. Arthur Symons, who went one afternoon to tea at The Pines, spoke in the most enthusiastic terms of the essay on *Hamlet*.* "It is fundamental criticism," was one of the remarks he made on that occasion, "and," he added, "there are some wonderful bits of writing too."

* Watts-Dunton's *Hamlet* article in *Harper's Magazine* appeared in May 1904.

In 1907, following immediately upon his Shakespeare series for *Harper's Magazine*, the request came to Watts-Dunton to write one of the prefaces for an *édition de luxe* of the complete works of William Shakespeare, from the University Press, Cambridge, Mass.; this work to be published in forty volumes, with an Introduction by Sir Sidney Lee.* The Preface containing *Pericles* was written by Swinburne, and the one containing *The Merchant of Venice* by Watts-Dunton.

His love of Shakespeare was a distinct feature in his literary life, as we have already endeavoured to show, and it is evident that on finding it imperative that he should renounce the work of editing the World's Classics edition of Shakespeare, he felt the disappointment deeply. With reference to this undertaking, Watts-Dunton wrote to Mr. Frowde, of the Oxford University Press :—

"I find it impossible, owing to the failure of my eyesight. An eminent oculist has been attending me for many months. Already the sight of one eye (the dominant eye) is gone, owing to the rupture of a blood-vessel on the retina from overstrain, and the oculist now tells me that the other eye can only be preserved by abstaining entirely from reading and writing. Everything has to be read out to me, and every word I produce is written to dictation, and unrevised by me. Many

* The "Renaissance Shakespeare," as it is called, was published in New York by Mr. George D. Sproul.

other literary projects have been delayed in the same way for the same cause, notably my novel *Carniola*. It is a bitter destiny to a man whose chief delight is in books, and whose brain seems to be more active as his eyes become more useless. Even before the ruptured blood-vessel, it was my eyesight alone that caused the delay in fulfilling my engagement with you. For I longed to proceed with so fascinating a subject. My instinct for thoroughness impelled me to collect a vast amount of material for the projected essays. But this material is entirely inchoate, except in regard to the first volume. Out of it I have written only the Introduction (which I now send you to accept or not, with any alterations that may suggest themselves to you); the essay on *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which you have already put into proof; and the essay on *The Tempest*, still in manuscript but ready for type. I can proceed not an inch further without inviting a terrible penalty.

"I have been grieving very much over the trouble I have caused you. Fortunately, however, your announcement in the World's Classics list is not so precise as I had imagined. It gives prominence to the preface by Algernon Swinburne, and not too much to my name. It says nothing of my projected preliminary essays to the plays.

"I can partially console myself with the thought that it was entirely to oblige me that my friend Swinburne produced his preface, and especially that it was I

who formulated the scheme of the typographical features of the book—a plan which recommended itself vastly to Swinburne and other select friends.

"I need scarcely say that I expect no honorarium whatever, either for my Introduction, should you use it, or for the trouble I took in planning out the typographical scheme of the page. You paid for Swinburne's preface, but I do not think you paid for anything else; but if you did, I shall be delighted to send you a cheque for the amount.

"The only essay that is in type, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, I suppose you will now cancel, to make the first volume harmonize with the rest. . . . Should you decide to adopt my Introduction after editing it according to your own views, please send the proof to me, and my secretary will read it out to me in the usual course, and I will return it at once."

In the following year (May 25, 1910) he wrote to the Oxford University Press: "In regard to the World's Classics *Shakespeare*, I am rejoiced to learn that Professor Dowden has taken it up. It could not possibly be in more competent hands."

Watts-Dunton's writings on Shakespearean problems afford a striking illustration of his critical power. With all his profound admiration for the genius of the dramatic poet, he is emphatically no idolater. Indeed, he approaches nearer to the latter-day school of Shakespearean criticism than does any other important critic

of his time, standing midway between such men as Dowden, Swinburne, Brandes, Bradley, Stopford Brooke on one hand, and on the other Bernard Shaw, Ernest Crosby, Frank Harris, Tolstoy.

At one with Dowden and his allies in his appreciation of the poetic genius of the dramatist, he is certainly more critical than they in his attitude towards Shakespeare's personality. Indeed, in his Preface to the World's Classics *Shakespeare* he speaks of Shakespeare as a "snob." *

The independence of his thought is shown as early as his essay on *The Lost Hamlet*.

Here is a characteristic passage :—

"Shakespeare's works as a whole (even if we leave out the Sonnets), show that his mind, like Hamlet's, was not a healthy one, in the sense that Homer's was a healthy mind, and that Chaucer's, and Cervantes', and Scott's were healthy minds. And if it be said that in this tangled web of life no clearest-seeing mind can, in this sense, be healthy, that is not a refutation of what we are saying, but a confirmation. It is not merely that this one play of *Hamlet* is full of morbid, charnel-house broodings, but Shakespeare seems to have kept a sort of Hamlet notebook, full of Hamlet thoughts, of which 'To be or not to be' may be taken as the type.

"These he was burdened with. These did he cram into *Hamlet* as far as he could, and then he tossed the

* This is quite in the Shavian vein.

others indiscriminately into other plays, tragedies, comedies, and histories, perfectly regardless of the character who uttered them.

"This is rank heresy, of course; yet surely it was from the Hamlet notebook that such thoughts as these slipped into the mouth of a man like Claudio, who never *could* have had them himself :—

> "'Ay, but to die and go we know not where,
> To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot!
> This sensible, warm motion to become
> A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
> To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
> In thrilling region of thick-ribbèd ice;
> To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
> And blown with restless violence round about
> The pendant world.'

"Again, it was from the Hamlet notebook that these reflections were put into the mouth of Macbeth, in the midst of action so busy that he had scarcely time to take breath :—

> "'To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusky death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more; it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.'

If it be said that Macbeth was a philosopher, and might have thought these thoughts even in the terrible strait

in which he then was, what shall we say to his stopping at Duncan's bedroom door, dagger in hand, to moralize after this fashion :—

> " 'Now, o'er the one half world
> Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
> The curtained sleep : now witchcraft celebrates
> Pale Hecate's offering,' etc. ?

Admirable thoughts, if expressed by Hamlet in the churchyard of Elsinore. But not, perhaps, what a murderer like Macbeth, in a frenzy of excitement, would have had or expressed.

" Prospero, too, was a philosopher ; but these words were surely given to him from the Hamlet notebook :—

> " 'We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.'

" Consider these things for one moment, and then again try to answer the question, Was Hamlet a creation of Shakespeare's dramatic art, or was he Shakespeare himself ? "

Into the merits of this reading of *Hamlet* we need not go for the moment ; none can deny its freshness and suggestive force. And this fresh vigour, initiated so early in his critical career, continued down to the very last. In the article on *Hamlet* which he wrote many years after for *Harper's Magazine*, there is the same alert mind at work, caring nothing for the traditional judgments of the schools, whether English or

German, and touching this well-worn theme with seminal power. He differentiates lucidly between the humour of Rabelais and that of Shakespeare. "Rabelais would not have understood the humour of Hamlet and Jaques, for to the Pantagruelist the only tragical catastrophe possible is that yearned for by Hamlet—

"'Oh that this too, too solid flesh would melt!'

Not even Falstaff nor Sir Toby Belch could ever have reached Gargantuanism. Pantagruelism is nothing but that hilarious acceptance by the soul of the burden of the flesh which Aristophanes sometimes shows, and would have always shown had there been no cruel gods on Olympus and no black hand of destiny overshadowing gods and men alike. For so inextricably mingled are man's body and soul that the hilarity which should naturally come from the play of the universe upon a healthy organism is spoiled unless the soul, whose one quest is safety, is, like the body, content. And the soul can never reach the Rabelaisian beatitude so long as it is vexed, as Shakespeare's soul was vexed, with thoughts and fears about its latter end. That age only can afford to eat, drink, and be merry between whom and 'the dreadful things of the dark' there stands a paternal Church."

Very refreshing, moreover, is the acute stricture on German Shakespearean criticism written at a time when there was so strong a tendency for English writers to say, "Blessed be the German critic, for he alone has the key to our Shakespeare!"—

"It seems to be an axiom nowadays that most bad things are made in Germany. And it may or may not be true; the poetical critic has nothing to say upon such a subject—in a general way. Yet if a tariff could be placed on German Shakespearean criticism, I know at least one student of English poetry who would become an ardent protectionist. . . . Although it is a matter of familiar knowledge that scarcely one of Shakespeare's plots was invented or partially invented by himself, this fact does not in any way prevent our German friends from writing long treatises upon the profound philosophical and allegorical intent of every Shakespearean plot. Of course these German vagaries would not be of any great moment to us islanders (for, after all, the best way to protest against commodities made in Germany is to refuse to accept them) if our English critics did not follow them. But because Goethe discussed *Hamlet* on German principles, and because Ulrici, Gervinus, and others discussed and discussed again Goethe's discussion, certain English critics—critics, let us say, far more capable of understanding the matter than any German who ever turned English poetry into abstractions—have held up their hands and exclaimed, 'Wonderful is the wisdom of criticism made in Germany!'"

In another essay—the one on *Macbeth*—Watts-Dunton repeats the theory which he had originally put fo-ward in *The Lost Hamlet*—the theory of a Hamlet notebook, whose overflowings he heaped upon Claudio

and Macbeth. The Claudio passage might well be from a Hamlet notebook, but surely Macbeth's last great speech is too poignantly fatalistic for Hamlet. It comes far better from a criminal who had realized the futility of his crime than from a mind merely "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

On the other hand, nothing could be better than the clear and sensible way in which the critic treats the "Knocking at the Gate" episode. Brushing aside De Quincey's ingenious theory of the breaking in of the real upon the poet's imaginative world, he explains the effectiveness of the situation by the fact that at this time we are sympathetically identified with the character, and feel as if we ourselves were being pursued. De Quincey's explanation suffers in his view from "over-acuteness."*

Watts-Dunton's quarrel with Coleridge (very rarely does he quarrel with such a protagonist), in attributing the Porter's humour to another hand, is admirably set forth.

Those who are weary of reading further critiques on *Macbeth* or *Hamlet* may be advised to turn to Watts-Dunton's article on *Cymbeline*,† which for its insistence on the poetic beauty and dramatic inequalities of the play could scarcely be bettered.

His sonnets on Shakespeare have appeared in the

* Is it not a case rather of over-subtlety than over-acuteness? De Quincey (unlike Hazlitt) was never an acute critic; he is often an extremely subtle one.

† Vide *Harper's Magazine*, April 1909.

Athenæum. In a letter to the editor of the *St. James's Gazette*, of April 20, 1900, he writes: "You will agree with me that St. George's Day (Shakespeare's birthday, as is generally supposed) ought to be kept as a general festival of race. And this above all years is the time for beginning it—when the Empire has reached a state of solidarity which I scarcely dared hope it could reach in my time, and when we are also on brotherly terms with the United States. As an Imperialist I am sure you will sympathize with me in this. I much wish I could write you something *new* for the occasion, but, as that is impossible, I venture to send you two sonnets written by me at Stratford-on-Avon on April 23, 1894, and printed in the *Athenæum* for April 28, 1894.

"On Shakespeare's birthday, as you know, Stratford is full of American and Colonial pilgrims, and their numbers annually increase, so these sonnets of greeting are even more appropriate now than they were six years ago. I cannot resist telling you how greatly I admire the courage, and sagacity, and talent with which you are fighting for the great cause of Imperialism. The *St. James's Gazette* was the earliest of the papers to speak up unflinchingly for England against the Boers."

These two sonnets he called *The Breath of Avon*.* They were addressed to "English-speaking pilgrims on Shakespeare's birthday."

* Vide *Jubilee Greeting*. (John Lane, 1897.)

END OF VOLUME I.

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